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Two Moods of A Man

Horace G. Hutchinson

1. Fiction, American.

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Two Moods of a Man

By

Horace G. Hutchinson

Author of "A Friend of Nelson," "Book of Golf and Golfers" "Dreams and their Meaning," etc.

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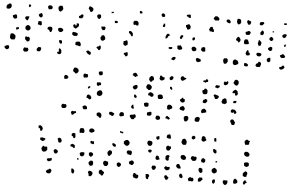

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TWO MOODS OF A MAN

Two Moods of a Man

CHAPTER I

THE SQUEAK OF A BOOT

By a mere chance it happened that I saw into the soul and life of one man more clearly and more closely than a man, or even maybe a woman, often sees into another man's soul—perhaps more clearly than it is often given to see into one's own. Had it not occurred to this man to write a certain letter to his bootmaker, or had he written that letter ten minutes earlier or ten minutes later, it is likely that I never should have known him. I do not affirm that he was a good man, still less that he was a great one. But perhaps even the most ordinary human being

would seem remarkable were his heart and soul and their workings (if it is proper to speak of them as two and not as one and the same) seen clearly and closely.

It is possible and easy for those to whom my friend's talk of his philosophies and his fancies may seem no better than foolishness to skip much of this—if they jump over Chapters V. and VI. altogether they will be perhaps happier, and conceivably no less wise—but for those to whom they do not seem intolerable it may be helpful to the understanding of the story to read them, for a story is more easily understood if there be some knowledge of the person who plays the chief rôle in it; and these philosophies and fancies were part of the very man, the chief part and chief interest of him.

Obviously this is a book without a hero, although it is mainly, or more or less, concerned with one man; but just because it is a man that it is concerned with, and not a lay figure, therefore it is not concerned with either a hero or a villain; for a man is neither of these,

though composed of both—that is, a man of flesh, not the stuffed man of a bad novel. A good novel does not have heroes and villains, as is easily noticed. It is not difficult to imagine a man to be either hero or villain, but that presupposes that much is left to the imagination, because of your little knowledge of the man. But of this man I had a good deal of knowledge. It was possible, of course, to have called the book by the man's name; but that would convey nothing, because no one will have heard of the man before beginning to read the book. And something might have been conveyed by calling it by a characteristic of the man, such as "The man with the cast-iron will," or something of that kind; only, unfortunately, the man had nothing at all like a cast-iron will, and was very human indeed—that is to say, a medley of characteristics. Or it might have been possible to name it by some function or office that the man exercised, as in writing a life of Mr. Chamberlain one might conceivably call it "The Colonial Secretary"

—only that there might exist people who do not think of Mr. Chamberlain as *the* Colonial Secretary, but rather as if there might be others; or, again, "The Saviour of the Empire," which also, however, has the drawback that a section of the community might not perceive that it applied of necessary and inevitable aptness to Mr. Chamberlain. In any case such a title was not eligible in the present instance, because this man made no efforts at all for the salvation of the Empire, nor for the secretaryship of the Colonies, or any other department, and not much effort, of any normal kind at all, even for the salvation of his own soul.

When first I happened to meet him he was, as I indicated, writing to his boot-maker. He always was something of a *farceur*. I did not know him at all at that time. I went into the writing-room of a club in St. James's Street, and imagined I had the room to myself. There was nobody there when I went in, and, besides, it was in September, when one rather expects to have a club to oneself. I went to the

writing-table and turned over the blotting-book preparatory to writing a letter, when I saw a letter already written lying open and unfolded within. It was short enough, very clearly written, and I hardly could have helped reading it if I had tried. As a matter of fact I did not try very hard, one way or the other. I read it at a glance, and was so surprised at it that, though I am not much in the habit of talking to myself, I exclaimed aloud, "What an extraordinary letter!"

"Ah," said a voice behind me, of some one who had come into the room noiselessly, almost directly following me. "I think it is my letter that I must have left there when I went out a moment ago. I had forgotten it. Do you think it is such an extraordinary letter?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I said, rising with a guilty laugh.

"Not at all," he answered. "You could not help reading it. Do you think it so extraordinary?"

"Well," I said, "it is a quaint letter—is n't it? To a bootmaker, I suppose?"

This was the letter:

"DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to be obliged to send back one of the three pairs of boots last sent me. Both of the returned pair squeak. The right one squeaks louder than a pig under a gate and the left one would squeak if the right one would let it be heard. You must either get the squeak out of them or else sell them to a churchwarden for taking the bag up the aisle in church. "Yours faithfully,

"GEORGE HOOD."

"Yes, it 's to a bootmaker, naturally."

"Do you buy three pairs at a time?"

"Yes, always—lay them down. They improve with keeping, you know—very much, boots, like wine. I wear them once or twice when they 're quite green, to get them into shape; then stow them by to mature, for the leather to toughen. They wear twice as long then—that 's economy, and comfort too. It means you only have to wear new boots half as often as if you always wore them fresh from the shop, and new boots are the devil for discomfort. Don't you find them so?"

I treated the answer as obvious. "You seem to have given it a lot of thought." I said.

"I always do. I always think out everything—everything bearing on practical life, I mean. The other things don't let themselves be thought out—the things that do not bear on practical life—you never get to the end of them. It saves time thinking out the others—makes for comfort, like storing up your boots."

I was getting some lights on my new friend. I had seen him in the club before, but never had spoken to him, never had noticed him. He disliked squeaky boots. That was a light. It was rather a negative light, it is true, but it went for something. You cannot tell what a man is by the fact of his dislike of a squeaky boot, but you can tell what he is not—not the utterly healthy insensible being that does not notice a thin noise. He was a man with nerves, to be irritated.

In the club are certain lockers, or rather pigeon-holes with locked doors, that may be hired by any of the members for the

rent, wholly extortionate but not out of proportion to their convenience, of five shillings a year, in which may be left pipes and tobacco pouch, papers — what you will.

My friend went to one of these and opened it with a key on his watch-chain. All that it contained were a tobacco pouch, a short black clay pipe, and a volume of Browning. This was another light — Browning and a black clay pipe. The association suggested a complex character in their owner. The name on the pigeon-hole was "G. Hood."

He was a big strong man, perhaps more than thirty, with brown hair and beard, dark brown with golden lights, a face giving a general impression of dark eyes and a complexion owing more to the air of the fields than towns—an impression of the virility and health that explained the black clay pipe, and a dreaminess about the eyes that explained the Browning. Somewhere about the mouth there ought to have been the lines of humor to explain the letter to the bootmaker, but

the golden brown hair of the face hid these, if they were there.

The acquaintance so begun prospered. We "passed the time of day" when we met in the club; sometimes we had luncheon at adjoining tables and talked meanwhile. I asked other members of the club about him. All liked him, but none knew much of him. He did not seem to be the kind of man that makes friends, or if he had friends they were not of the club; but of acquaintances, friendly acquaintances, he had plenty. After a little while it seemed as if I were his friend rather more than any one else in the club, and yet I knew practically nothing about him. All our talk was of the every-day subjects—politics, theatres, sport—that do not reveal the soul that is in a man, if he has one—that is, of course, supposing his trade is not politics or acting. Then, one day, much to my surprise, he asked me to come and stay with him in the country—it was the first time, by-the-bye, that I ever had heard him mention that he had a place in the country—and I

said I should be delighted, and asked him where it was. To that very common-place question he returned, I think, the most extraordinary answer that any man ever did return. Even he hesitated a little about it, as if he felt I should deem it unusual. "Well," he said, "I don't exactly know."

"Not know!" I repeated blankly.

"No," he said, "not exactly. That is I know pretty nearly, but not quite."

I looked hard at him. There was no sign of insanity in his manner or appearance, yet from that moment, until I actually saw his country place, I never doubted at all that he was slightly mad. But there was not the least indication of a tendency to violent derangement. He was perfectly gentle. When a man is like that, one does not wish to press him too hardly, and in any case it is rather delicate work questioning a man who seems disposed to evade your inquiries about the hospitality he is offering you. So I said again in some common form of words that I should be delighted to come. He suggested

Monday of the following week as the first day of my visit. "I think it's sure to be Victoria," he said, "for the station, and I'll let you know the train. Will an afternoon train suit you? It won't be more than two hours at most from town."

That was agreed. On the Saturday I had a note from him saying the train went at 4 P.M., and at ten minutes to the hour I met him, according to the suggestion of his note, under the station clock. "What station do we book to?" I asked.

"I think Hartfield will be best," he said. "I have made arrangements for having us met there."

Accordingly I booked to Hartfield. When we were in the train he said: "By-the-bye, I ought to have told you—I hope you have n't brought any dress clothes or that sort of thing. My wife and I live very simply."

It was the first time that he had mentioned a wife.

I said that I had dress clothes, but could dine very contentedly in any others. We arrived at Hartfield about a quarter to six,

without a change. It is a station between East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells, on the edge of Ashdown Forest. One way of explaining, to those who do not know the geography, where this fine tract of forest or common land lies, is to indicate how the railway lines roughly define it. It is too highly tilted up and severely ridged for any railway company to care to run its lines across it. It lies, then, bounded by the line from East Grinstead to Groombridge on the north, by the line from Groombridge to Uckfield on the east and south, and by the line from East Grinstead to Sheffield Park on the west. That will fairly indicate where it lies—in the northern angle of Sussex.

CHAPTER II

HIS "PLACE IN THE COUNTRY"

"We are very simple people," he had said. "I hope you have not brought more than a hand-bag. We may have to carry it a bit ourselves."

Nevertheless, a fly was awaiting us at Hartfield station on arrival of the train. The dusk was falling. My friend had some little difficulty, as it appeared, in explaining to the driver exactly where he wished to go. It struck me as curious that the man did not know the house. The road we followed, after passing through the village of Hartfield, was one of exceeding steepness, both in its ups and downs, so we made slow progress. It also struck me that probably it was a road of exceeding beauty, had the light allowed us to see more of the landscape; but

before we had been driving many minutes the warm summer night had descended, obliterating all color. We passed one or two farms or cottages with lights twinkling in the windows, but evidently the country was a wild and sparsely inhabited one. On the whole our way was very much more up than down, and it seemed that we must have reached a considerable elevation when my friend called to the driver to stop.

"I think this is about as near as we can get," he said, stepping out and lifting my bag from the carriage. He had his own bag also, but it was a very small affair, not much larger than the bags that business men use for their papers. He paid the driver. "I think this will be our way," he then said, striking off the road along what was little more than a rabbit run across a heather-clad waste.

For the first time in course of the expedition my heart began to beat anxiously with the sensation of fear. I began to be assured that I had committed myself to the guidance of a lunatic. At every stage

of our journey something or other had occurred to arouse my surprise. The man's extraordinary doubt as to the station we should come to, the conversation between him and the flyman as to the way, finally the indecision that he expressed as we took the plunge on foot over the trackless heath into the darkness—all these extraordinary circumstances, each in itself trivial enough, maybe, had a cumulative force that, as I suddenly realized the sum of them, made my heart stand still with fear. I looked back to where the horse and fly remained on the road, the dark mass of carriage and steed dimly seen, the light of the lamp twinkling out through the mist of heat rising from the body of the horse panting from the exertions of the up-hill road. It seemed to me that here, in this homely fly with its driver, was my last remaining link with the sane world. I was on the point of calling my friend to halt and give me an explanation when the flyman turned his horse about and the vehicle began to redescend the hill again at the horse's slow trot. The

last bond with a rational civilization was severed. I was committed to follow my lunatic—it might be to the end of the earth.

The emotional nature of man is curiously constituted. While the horse, the carriage, and the driver were there, within hail, I had the strongest possible inclination to call out to the driver to wait for me until I should get from my friend a distinct explanation of whither he was leading me. But no sooner had the driver gone clean out of the world, so far as any present help in my circumstances was concerned, and the rumbling of the vehicle died away in the distance, than a change of emotion took complete hold of me. I felt no sense of fear any more. The die was cast now. I was in for it, committed to the adventure, and at once the spirit of adventure, dormant no doubt, as an inheritance from far-back generations, in the heart of even the most conventional of men, asserted itself with force that left no nerve channels available along which other emotions could make themselves felt. I was not alarmed.

I was but the more entertained and excited when my singular guide put his fingers into his mouth and whistled in a curious and peculiarly shrill manner that was positive torture in the ear-drums, and even seemed to rend the still night air in a way that one could hardly fail to think grievous to it—a strident outrage on its peace. And if this was a peculiar and distressing sound enough, it was answered from the depths and the hazy mists in the valley below by a voice yet more peculiar and weird, repeating again and again in a screaming welcome, echoing and vibrating through the still night, "Ge-orge! Ge-orge!" almost in dissyllable.

"What is that?" I asked, faint with astonishment.

"That?" he repeated with a laugh. "It is my name—George! She knows my whistle."

Again the strident sounds, in the scarcely human voice, came shrilly to our ears, "Ge-orge! Ge-orge!"

In spite of all the spirit of adventure being aroused, a cold shudder went along

my marrow. "What manner of woman could it be that would greet the approach of a man by thus screaming his name out through the dark of night in wild, unearthly tones that might startle a child from its sleep into convulsions at half a mile? It was terrible. Was this his maniac wife to whom this friend of mine —member of my respectable and dull St. James's Street club — was conducting me in the midst of the wild Sussex moor?" But I no longer felt myself to belong to earth, still less to have any relation with conventional society. I moved in a strange wonderland where anything might happen except the expected.

We went down the hill through a brushwood of oak and birch scrub rising to the height of a man. Presently a glow, like an island of dim light, was cast on the haze lying in the vale below us. The smell of wood-smoke came to us. Big dark shapes, here and there lit by a ruddy flare from a fire in the open, loomed up through the night; a great dog came out at a gallop and jumped joyfully at my

friend, interrupting this greeting to throw me a growl in the intervals. We came within the circle of light, in the presence of two vans and a tent. A man was by the fire, tending it. Down the stair of the bigger van came a woman with a quick, young step. She stopped short a moment, when about to greet my companion, as she saw that he was not alone.

"I have brought a friend to stay with us a day or two Gracia," he said; and I hope I bowed. I do not know what I said. I trust that by the training of years I behaved with decent grace, for all power of acting on a reasoned motive went from me when the full light of the lantern swinging at the van's door fell on the woman's face.

CHAPTER III

VENUS OF THE VAN

SHE was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. To say that is not to say nearly enough to express the impression that she made on me, not only then, but since and always. She was not only the most beautiful woman I ever had seen, but she was quite in a different class of beauty from every other. It was a difference of kind, almost more than degree. It was a revelation to me that the human face could be so beautiful. The form of the face was Grecian. There was that straight continuance of the line of the forehead to form the line of the nose that is so characteristic of the Grecian profile as we see it expressed in the best sculptures. Over and over again I have noticed the likeness in this respect of the facial

lines of the woman of the van to the lines of the face of that most beautiful work of art ever seen by modern men, the *Hermes* of Praxiteles. And the lower part of the face of this wonderful creature was like that of the *Hermes* too, which, after all, has much that is typical of feminine facial beauty. The full lips with their charming expression of pleasure and happiness were the same, the firm and softly rounded contour of the chin and cheeks was the same. The face was a full, soft, perfect oval in its form. The differences from the type of the *Hermes* seemed to be, in the first place, that this was a woman of the dark type, of the Spanish coloring such as Velasquez paints it. It is likely, indeed, that the model, or the models, from which the *Hermes* was made were dark; but, for all that, the face in its marble purity, as we see it, gives the impression of the portrait of a fair blonde youth. That, at least, is how it appeals to me. So there was this difference, or imagined difference, between the face of the living woman and the face of the mar-

ble youth, in the first place ; and then the hair on the woman's brow grew and clustered low down with its dark curls, giving to the wide forehead an impression of even greater width than it had. And finally the eyes, rather deep set under the brows, were finer than those in the statue. They were larger, wide-open eyes, of a wonderful violet depth of coloring, and shaded with long dark lashes curving upwards and adding to their mystery and beauty.

Never have I beheld another such face, and never shall. One of the greatest charms that it had was its look of perfect content and happiness. That of course implies, of necessity, the look of perfect health. The color and form of the woman implied that also. Her height was medium ; small by the standard of the young woman of modern days ; perhaps five feet and a half at most. For the modern ideal of beauty her figure was too full, not slim enough, of rounded contours. It was the figure of a woman who had never known the constraint of the tight waist,

and conformed in this again to the classic Grecian type. Her head was without other covering than the heavy coils of her rich dark hair; her bodice of dark purplish red, cut low and adorned with some golden open work, gave a sight of a beautifully formed and much sunburnt neck and chest; her petticoat was of some coarse stuff of grayish blue, and her feet were clad in those shapeless slippers of canvas, with rope-work soles, that are commonly worn in the northern parts of Spain. Her hands were as brown as if they had been stained with walnut juice, but so small that, as George Hood told me afterwards, on the rare occasions that he had bought gloves for her, he had been obliged to buy children's sizes, or else to have them specially made.

I have not the slightest doubt that I stared like a fool, and a rude fool, at the wondrous apparition of beauty in the uncertain light of the lamps and the fire, for I can recall none of my sensations until I was aroused from a state of stupid contemplation by Hood's laugh

reminding me that I was being introduced to a lady.

Then some of the trite words that suit the occasion came to my mind, and I was going to say them when all other sound or hope of hearing was drowned in that shrill, cutting "Ge-orge! Ge-orge!" that I had heard before, far off, but now heard close at hand from the van itself. After the screech had ceased there was a sound like the beating of great wings, as if it had left the air all in a turmoil. At the same time, what looked like a white ghost showed in the dim inside of the van.

"Polchinello—quiet!" cried the woman of the van in the tone one uses to chide a dog. She spoke with the accent of a Latin tongue.

"Let the poor thing come out," said Hood, going up the steps of the van. In a moment he was back with a white cockatoo of immense size on his shoulder. The bird showed its pleasure by putting up and down its big crest of orange yellow, rubbing its head against the man's cheek, picking delicately with its great hooked

beak at a hair of his beard, but pulling it only in the gentlest way possible. Each little tug was a caress.

"That is what it is that was calling?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "Did you think"—the woman and he looked at one another and smiled; evidently those two understood each other—"Did you think it was Gracia?"

When her red ripe lips parted to laugh over the even white teeth she was more adorably beautiful than ever.

"I 'll show you round," Hood said, "and then we 'll have dinner. You won't want to do much dressing. I told you you would n't want dress clothes."

It was the only thing he had told me, the only thing he did tell me, by way of any kind of explanation. One might have thought that he would have made some apology, even a humorous one—might have suggested that it was a surprise to me to find his "place in the country" just what it was. But it did not occur to him to do this. He "showed me round." The

round was made soon. There were two vans, rather bigger than the average size that gypsies use. There was a big open fire of sticks on the ground, and a stove of some sort beside it. An old man with a white beard, aquiline nose, and keen black eyes was busied about the stove and fire, cooking. The process was sensible to the nose, more clearly than to the eye by the flickering light; and the tinkling clatter of platters told a like tale to the ear, as the things were handed out from the van by a slip of a youth who seemed to act scullion to the old man's cook. All this went on to leeward of the van I had seen first, from which the beautiful woman had come, and the cockatoo. An occasional snort or a stamp showed that there were horses pasturing close by.

I took my friend by the sleeve, away from the hearing of the man cooking.

"Who is she?" I asked, jerking a thumb towards the first van.

"She!" he said, in a tone of surprise that I should ask the question. "That's my wife."

I was puzzled about the right dress for this dinner. My bedroom was a part of the second van, partitioned off from the part where the plates and things were kept. One could just stand upright. The berth was a shelf along the wall of the van. I put on a smoking suit of rather a fine design and color, and went round to the first van, beside which we were to dine.

A wood table was set out on the grass beside the van. The van door was shut, and I had time to look at the preparations for dinner without host or hostess seeing me. The table was quite clean, and there were knives and forks laid on it—no table-cloth. There were no plates yet, but three wicker chairs set about showed the number of the party expected. A lantern, swung from a birch-bough that reached over the table, lighted it all; and the night was so still that the lantern, thus hung, hardly moved.

The van door opened, and from it came, first, the white figure of the cockatoo, helping itself down the van steps with

beak and feet. Then it came over the grass, with ungainly movements, towards the table. There was a stick, a branch of a tree cut so that two horizontal side shoots stood out at the top, planted into the ground at what you might, if you like, call the head of the table, and up this stick the creature climbed, hand over hand, and beak over both, until it had gained the top, There it stayed, perched on the horizontal, saying nothing but continually bowing and elevating and depressing its fine crest as if it were in agitation at my unfamiliar presence.

Presently the beautiful woman came from the van door. My friend followed, and I saw that he was dressed for dinner; that is to say that, instead of the usual dress of convention, he had a gray flannel shirt, with collar of the same, rather open at the neck, and a suit of rough tweeds.

"Polchinello can't make out your smoking suit. Never saw anything so smart before," he said with a laugh at the bird, who still kept coquetting and curtseying at me. "Tio! Ready for dinner!"

I thought his "Tio" was a term of endearment for the bird, but it seemed that it was meant for the old man with the bird-like face, who came now from the murky glow about the fire with a great bowl that smoked and gave a savory odor. The slouchy youth brought soup plates and banged each down on the table with a clatter that sent the wings of the cockatoo up in alarm, responsive to each bang.

"Soup?" said Hood, when we had taken our places.

"This is excellent. I never tasted better." I said, referring to the soup.

"Do you know what it is?" Hood asked me.

"Hare? But no—what is it?"

"Squirrel. It is better than hare, is n't it?"

"Yes," I said. "I think it is."

Trout followed as the next course. "Tio, you 've been tickling again." Hood said severely. "I told you I would n't have the trout taken out unless you caught them fairly." Tio did not trouble to answer, but chuckled with a kind of

grim humor. A chicken and a landrail on the same dish came then, and a very good omelet, a little more savory of the garlic than I wanted, finished the dinner. Then there were apples and coffee—very good coffee.

Perhaps I was too frank in showing that the dinner was beyond my expectation, for the host said to my hostess, "He thought he 'd get nothing to eat but hedgehog and badger."

"Have your ever eaten them?" I asked him.

"Badger often; and it 's good," he said, "but not hedgehog. I never could manage hedgehog. It 's always seemed a little too 'sniffy' for me."

"Odoriferous?"

He nodded. "Gracia 's eaten it often though. Have n't you?"

"Oh yes, often," she said.

"Do they really cook it in a ball of clay? That 's how I 've been told."

"Yes," she said, "that 's the best way. I never have it when we 're by ourselves though."

"Is it a company dish?"

"Gracia gets it when she goes into company. That 's what she means," Hood said. "When she goes down to the Forest, and dines with her friends there, she often has hedgehog."

"To the Forest?" I asked, puzzled.

"That 's the New Forest. We always talk of it like that."

"And the hedgehogs are always cooked like that—in a clay ball?" I asked Gracia.

"Yes, but I always make them kill them first, if I have anything to do with the cooking. I think it 's cruel not to," she said.

"Not to? Not to what? To kill them first? Do you mean to say they sometimes cook them alive?"

"Oh, yes, that is the regular way—always."

Tio and the youth came and joined us, now that dinner was over. As waiters their costume was picturesque. Both wore trousers spreading out bell-wise, rather in the nautical style, over the feet, but much tighter in the leg than sailors

wear them; cut-away coats, and very brightly colored, long skirted waistcoats. The most striking feature of both costumes were the buttons of the coat and waistcoat. In the case of the youth they were of mother-of-pearl, very large indeed on the coat, smaller on the waistcoat. The old man's coat had buttons that seemed to be made of some very large silver coins. Looking at them closely, by such light as the swinging lantern gave, while he sat up by the table, I could see that they were of some foreign country's mint. The buttons of his waistcoat were smaller, not more than a third the size of the coat buttons, but to my astonishment they were of gold. He must have carried some value in his buttons.

After we had talked and smoked for a while, Gracia said "Good-night" and went up into her van, taking with her Polchinello, the cockatoo; and Tio and the youth retired to the region of the other van and of the fire to put things in order for the night. George Hood and I were by ourselves.

"'Tio' means 'uncle' in Spanish, as I dare say you know," he said. "I call him that because Gracia has always called him so. He is not her uncle really. I don't suppose he is any relation to her at all. I met these people in Spain when I was fishing—there are some really good trout in some of the rivers of northern Spain—they are Spanish gypsies—that is to say Tio and the boy are. Gracia—no one knows what she is. She was a kidnapped child—that is certain, I think. Tio admitted that much to me; but he does not know whom she was taken from. He got her in exchange for a mule. He and his wife brought her up. But his wife is dead. She died soon after I met them."

CHAPTER IV

BREAKFAST

In the morning I awoke to the sounds of a voice that I had not heard the night before. I looked out and saw my host, already dressed, playing pitch and toss with a brown baby of some eighteen months, that was screaming with joy at each toss and each catching.

"Your property?" I asked Hood, speaking of the child.

"I have a half share in him. Perhaps I ought to say a quarter only, and Gracia three fourths. He is a fractional person."

"Never fractious?"

"Never known to be. That is a reason the more for saying he is three fourths Gracia and only one fourth me."

It seemed a good reason for his adjustment of the fractions. The impress of a

perfectly balanced nature and temper was on the mother's face. The face would have failed, I suppose, in some point of perfect beauty had it not been so; and when I saw that wonderful face again in the full light of the morning under which we breakfasted, I set myself with deliberate criticism the task of trying to find a line that could be changed to add to its perfection—but in vain.

Breakfast was like dinner, in the sufficiency and goodness of the food, such as trout and eggs, with coffee that Gracia made by a spirit lamp on the table. The breeze was so soft that, as soon as Hood had sheltered the blue flame by putting up a book for a screen, it burned quite steadily. I looked at the title of the book, which he had fetched from the van. It was an Epictetus.

Next to her bewildering beauty, the quality that most struck me in Gracia was her repose.

"Do you read Epictetus?" I asked. She shook her head, smiling.

Hood smiled too. "Gracia," he said,

"is like old Lord F——. Some one asked him whether he had read some book or other, and he answered, 'I don't read books.'"

"But I like them when you read them to me," she said.

"Yes — some books," he admitted. "Provided they are poetry, and just of the kind you like, you like them. Do you know what Gracia's favorite book is?" he asked, turning to me. "Why, Robert Bridges's *Shorter Poems.* It shows a pretty cultured taste, does it not?"

"I don't think I know them," I had to confess.

"Not know them! I envy you. You can't match his landscape description for truth and beauty together. How is this for a description of the Downs:

O bold majestic downs, smooth, fair, and lonely:
O still solitude, only matched in the skies;
  Perilous in steep places,
  Soft in the level races,
Where sweeping in phantom silence the cloudland
    flies;
With lovely undulation of fall and rise:

Entrenched with thickets thorned,
By delicate miniature dainty flowers adorned!

He did n't want 'dainty' as well as 'delicate' in that last line, but is not the whole thing good?

"And this again:

The cliff-top has a carpet
Of lilac, gold, and green;
The blue sky bounds the ocean,
The white clouds scud between;

A flock of gulls are wheeling
And wailing round my seat;
Above my head the heaven,
The sea beneath my feet.

Nothing in it, of course," he commented, "but it makes you see it all."

"It 's like Tio's playing when you say poetry like that," Gracia said.

"Tio is a fiddler," Hood explained. "We must have a concert to-night."

Epictetus had done his function as a wind shield for the flame, which was let go out. "I like this old fellow," Hood said, taking up the volume and turning

the pages. "His ideas of the kinship of God and man are wonderful for the time when he lived. I like this, too, in his argument that, because man is akin to God, it might be better for him to kill himself to be free of the bonds of the body and enjoy the kinship more fully. 'Here,' he says—*i. e.*, on earth—'there are robbers, thieves, and Courts of Justice.' I like the conjunction of the thieves and Courts of Justice as equal evils."

I glanced at Gracia. During the recital of the verses her eyes had sparkled, her lips had smiled, all her face was lit with appreciation. But the prose did not touch her. Probably she did not understand it, and what surprised me was that her brow showed no sign of thought or of effort to catch the meaning. She seemed just to let it go by unheeded. In the course of the morning I had some talk with her alone, while Hood at a little distance played with the child. I wondered that she asked me nothing about my meeting her husband and about our London life in general. She asked few questions on any

subject, though she would talk readily enough on a topic of her own life that I started. She struck me at once as notably free from that attractive weakness of her sex—curiosity.

CHAPTER V

THE PHILOSOPHIC MUSE

"COME for a little stroll with me and baby; and I am going to teach you a new sensation," George Hood said. "It is a sensation any one may enjoy on a fine day in summer—in winter too, for that matter, if it is n't so cold that the cold overpowers all the other sensations. It is very cheap, it is very pleasant, and it is unlike any other sensation in the world."

This was promising much. "Let us lie down here," he said, when we came to a nice mossy place beside the stream. "No, not like that," he objected, as I reclined on one elbow—"like this, flat on your back."

So, flat on the back, with head cushioned on the heather!

Then he said: "Look up now into the sky. Look at the fleecy little clouds that you can see, and yet you can hardly see, going over the sky at any height you like to say—no one can check your estimate—now tell me what you feel."

"I can't," I said.

"No," with a chuckle, "I knew you would n't be able to tell me. It is unlike anything else in the world. It is indescribable."

We lay there awhile, side by side, gazing up into the fathomless blue overhead. There was a kind of vertigo, of the mysterious delightful sensation of well-being and pleasant fancy that opium gives. The process that went on in the brain was hardly an intellectual one of consecutive thought—it was rather a succession of sensations, all gently pleasurable. It was the most nerve-soothing state I have known.

One tired even of this after awhile, or perhaps the truth is that one grew afraid of it, afraid of its effect on the brain, as of the influence of a narcotic. I turned on

my side and took shorter views — of a spider hunting through the heather.

"I want a *motif* for a new book," I said. "Can you give me one?"

"Yes," said he. "I will give you the elements of a very excellent book. Its theme will be human nature, and human nature perhaps as concerned more specially with its views of a spiritual life, a hereafter, a religion—however you like to call it. The *personæ dramatis* that you must have are chiefly these—a parson of orthodoxy, an agnostic doctor, and a rustic. The parson of orthodoxy will be of the kind that believes in praying for rain, and not only for rain generally but, as the Welsh divine is said to have prayed in addition, 'and not, O Lord, rain of that lashing kind that comes down and floods the fields in torrents and rushes off again without doing a mite of good; but the soft, gentle, penetrating rain that we see beginning about five o'clock in the afternoon, and looks as if it were going on all night'— explaining to the Almighty, do you see? the sort of thing that was

wanted, so that He could have no possible excuse for making a mistake. That is the sort of parson. Well, such a man as this will be genuinely surprised, he will be altogether dumfounded to see a man of agnostic notions, as I would have your doctor be, going about among the poor of his parish, doing good gratis, sitting up all night to help an old man or old woman in suffering and actually reading the Bible—yes, reading the Bible actually—to our old rustic on his death-bed. There has got to be no mistake, mind you, about the immense, the unbounded comfort that the rustic has on his death-bed, and has had all his life through, out of his utter simple faith in the Scripture and all the Bible promises. There must be no mistake about that. Of course you can bring him in as a bit of relief, as something of a comic character, besides. These fellows cannot fail to be humorous if only you can succeed in making them natural.

"So, of course the parson will be astounded yet more by hearing the doctor thus reading the Bible; but naturally he

will be very much shocked too. He will take—he will even venture to take—the doctor to task for it afterwards, asking him how he, the unbeliever, can dare, can presume, can go so near the verge of blasphemy as to read these sacred words in the ear of a dying believer. And that, of course, pulls up the flood-gates of the doctor's eloquence on this hardest of all the questions that is set before the honest man, the seeker for truth, of to-day, who cannot accept the faith of the orthodox Christian, yet sees the immense comfort (comfort that nothing but religious faith of some sort, and faith, a convinced faith in a hereafter) can bring to humanity—the question, namely, whether nothing is to be put into comparison with truth, whether it is truth that it behoves him to go forth into the desert of delusion (speaking of truth and delusion as he conceives them, of course) and proclaim, breaking down the images, like an Iconoclast, though knowing he has nothing to put on their empty pedestals, or whether he should leave men in their infinitely

consoling delusions with their idols that are so dear and precious. Oh, it is a terrible problem," he said, and sighed as one who feels the weight of a great burden.

"Is it absolutely sure," I asked, "that there is nothing that can be put on the pedestals in the place of these idols?"

"Nothing," he replied sadly. "Nothing that I can see. Nothing, nothing, that is to say, that appeals to me as in the least degree satisfying. To some, as it appears, it does seem more or less satisfactory. Just read this, by-the-bye." He took from the heather, where he had laid it, as he spoke, a volume of *Lectures and Essays* by W. K. Clifford. "Look at this, at the end of his wonderfully good essay, as it seems to me, on 'Body and Mind'—characteristic of the man, by the way, the order in which he puts the two, body first, mind next, in the order of evolution. He has come practically to this conclusion, from the consideration of the correlative nature of mind and matter (or, as he would say, matter and mind) that when the man dies and the nerves no

longer bring messages to the 'gray matter' of the brain and conduct them down again, all is annihilated. That is where I would have you begin."

He handed me the book, and, breaking off a bit of bracken, began thoughtfully tickling with it the soles of the baby's feet. I read on to the end of the interesting chapter he had opened for me, while the baby kept up an accompaniment of gurgling appreciations and protests, as it kicked its feet up away from the tickling. When I laid the book down Hood began to discuss the argument with a facility that showed his perfect recollection of it:

"The gist of what he says, as it touches our doctor's argument, is just this, that he offers us what is called the religion of humanity as a substitute for those dear comforting idols that he has knocked from their pedestals, and I cannot say that I find the substitute satisfying for me; I do not believe it can be a substitute satisfying for you, and I am absolutely, beyond all reach of argument, sure that it never, or

not for very many generations, can be a satisfying substitute for the poor rustic to whom we have seen our doctor reading the words of comfort, in which he has not a shred of belief, at the death-bed. That is the trouble of the whole matter."

I thought much about what he said afterwards, but at the time I put it by in my mind for later consideration, and said: "Yes, you have given me three very good characters maybe, and an interesting situation and discussion, but that will fill but a very little corner of the canvas of a life picture."

"Yes," he admitted, "that is true. I will suggest some others. I will suggest a group of young men. We will put them at Oxford. I will suggest one that shall have all the receptive faculty very highly developed. He will be the one that will take all the honors in the schools; he will be in after years the statesman, the champion of causes, impressing because impressed. I will put him at the highest level of that class of mind, if you like. I will make him a Gladstone. Then I will have

another, an able fellow, of an entirely different class of mind, a critic, a self-critic, an analyzer, of the philosophic type of mind. He will probe deeper beneath the surface of things than the other. He will not be a champion, an enthusiast. He will be of colder nature, a doubter. He will have no success, no worldly success; but he will cherish a secret scorn of the success of the other, of the objects in which his interests and his enthusiasm are placed. If he dared to criticise the former at the top of his success he would be jeered for his presumption and folly at criticising this champion. Yet perhaps he would be right and the more right of the two; but he would not be in touch, he would be out of touch with, perhaps he would be ashamed of, the tendencies of his age."

"I suppose you know," I said, "whom you have taken as the model for your hero—both for this hero, and also for the other, your doctor? It is that which has made all you have said so interesting to me."

"The model? No. No particular model."

"The fact that you do not recognize the model," I said, "makes it the more interesting still. The hero in both cases is yourself. Unconsciously you have given each of them parts of your own mental likeness."

"Which only shows," he said, laughing, "if it is so—which I don't for a moment believe — what a bad novelist I should make, what a bad artist I must be. I cannot lose myself in my creations."

CHAPTER VI

THE DÆMON

EVERY now and then the baby, crawling over the mossy carpet that the perpetual sprinkling of the water from the little fall had nourished to a vivid emerald green, wandered perilously near the verge of the low cliff, beneath which lay the pool below the fall. On such occasions Hood would go on hands and knees, after the child, stretch out a hand and draw it back by the ankle from the dangerous abyss without the slightest interruption of his dissertation. A strange scene this—of my friend of the respectable London club uttering his philosophies, his baby, in brown and unshamed nudity, crawling over the moss; below, the fall of the water glancing white foam over amber depths and prattling a constant accom-

paniment; around, the white-stemmed birches with their delicate lace-work foliage, the beauty of the bracken, the heather and the gorse; and above, the blue sky of heaven in which the skylarks were carolling the most charming music—a scene that one hardly believed to belong to the same world as St. James's Street.

"He presents a great number of problems," said Hood, as we watched the boy stretching his small, round limbs over the moss. "To what life am I to bring him up—to that of his mother, wandering over the face of the earth? The common sense of the world would say, 'Do something better for him than that!' Yet how can I take him from her? And as for that something better, what is it? Is it better to be sitting in a London house than here?"

To feel the force of the question one must realize what that "here" meant—the rippling brook, the beautiful glade, the blue sky, the colors, the forms, the brightness, the life that make the enchantment of God's country. Realizing

this, it was obviously absurd to put it into the comparison with man's town. And yet, in the very midst of it all the spirit of convention was so strong upon me that I had to answer: "They always say that a man's the happier for having some work to do, some profession."

"They do," he asserted with grave irony. "What is there that *they* will not say? After all, there may be something in what they say in regard to this. The ordinary man of to-day may have from generations of toiling ancestors a disposition that makes work a necessity. For all that, you will see that most men speak of work as an excellent thing for others: they do their best to escape it themselves. If we were to believe the Bible, work was given to man as a curse, not a blessing. People forget that."

"Or is this a possibility, I will venture to ask you," I said, "that we draw too severe a line between work and play, as if the one was pleasurable and the other painful, distinctly? Surely that is not quite right. William Morris's ideal is a

moderate number of hours of daily work that a man enjoys in the doing. When you can realize the fact that there may be and ought to be an enjoyment of work, then we find the problem much simplified. And it is a grave indictment of the state of our society that we should feel a line of acute division between them."

"That comes to what Huxley said, that the one weak point in the teaching of Christ as applied to modern needs is that it preaches idleness and little thrift.

"The Bambino at least, he said, looking towards his son, has no legacy from his mother's side, I expect, of a strong disposition to work. She does not worry herself with the search for Truth with a big T."

"That may be," I said. "In any case, it seems to me that in your argument, or Clifford's argument, which you quoted with approval, you required me to grant you an enormous postulate, namely, that it is a duty to seek Truth with the big T, possibly even at the expense of happiness."

"You are perfectly right," he said; "it is a most arbitrary postulate. Why should we grant it? And yet it is granted almost universally. Another postulate that I would point out to you, equally arbitrary, is that we should study and do that which tends to the preservation of the race. Look at page 331 in that very book of Clifford's *Lectures and Essays* that you are holding. Happiness is an intelligible end to strive for. It has been taken far too much for granted, in my opinion, that increase of knowledge tends to increase of happiness. I believe that to have been true in the creation up to a certain point —that the dog, let us say, has more happiness than the reptile—more susceptibility of pleasures—it is also true, more susceptibility of pains, but I think the pleasures exceed the pains. Evolution is for the happiness of the creature up to a certain point, I believe; but it ceases to be for the happiness of the creature exactly as soon as that creature begins to be man."

"Why so?" I asked in some surprise.

"Because exactly at that point the creature begins to have consciousness that it must die, that its time is short, and I do say that this source of unhappiness (quite a different thing from what is called 'the fear of death,' I would have you understand) outweighs by far—at all events in the present stage of evolution—the superior happiness, if any, derived from higher organization, from intellectual and æsthetic pleasure, and so on."

"This is a very startling and gloomy theory," I said.

"Quite so," he admitted, "but if we are on the search for truth we must not, according to our postulate, relinquish a theory on any ground of that kind. It is man that has invented the idea of time and its finiteness, I would have you see. Dogs and the lower animals live in a virtual eternity. There is wretchedness in this idea. It is not *fear* of death, as I said. No man, speaking generally, *fears* to die. He may fear, at the imminent approach of sudden or violent death—that is not the way it comes to most of us—but

whether a man be a Christian, a pagan, or an agnostic, what you will, at the end, by a natural beneficent process, his energies and faculties lose so much of their grasp on life that death seems but the right and inevitable further step. Now and again the step is accompanied with pain, but the pain is physical, not mental; it is incidental, not essential. But if death is to mean annihilation, it is natural that, when we look forward to it while our faculties are still quick and active, the idea should revolt us."

"Is annihilation your idea?" I asked.

"At all events," he replied, "it is an idea against which I strive with all my heart and soul. I strive to catch every fleeting glimpse of a light that may mean something better. But in any case do not let us deceive ourselves. If annihilation is not to be our lot, then it must be a continuance of the individual consciousness, of the personal memory. The *ego* is bound together by memory. Passage through Lethe water means a virtual reincarnation. If we lose sight of that fact

we deceive ourselves, and if we begin to question it we begin a mere battle of words."

"Do you think that really exhausts all the possibilities?" I questioned. "So many people seem to make their halt somewhere between these two opinions."

"It does not prove the ground to be sound, that a number of people should stand on it," he said. "However, there is yet one other intelligible alternative suggested besides annihilation or the continued existence of the present consciousness according to the sense that we usually apply to this; and that is the possibility that when we die we become part of, or rather we discover that we here have been only part of, a larger self. It is possible—and when I say it is possible, in this sense, I mean merely that it is not contrary to what we are entitled to say that we know scientifically—in that sense, then, it is possible that what we here and at present call 'self,' we shall some day learn to be only part of a greater 'self,' of a conscious and self-conscious personality that may have

attributes at which we cannot guess, but which may have, among those attributes, the memory of the life upon earth passed, for a while, by a part of itself. It may have a memory of all the acts done here, and it is not impossible (again in the same sense of possible) that those acts may have a moral meaning and significance in their effect on the quality of the larger self. A life in which acts have been done habitually in opposition to the Divine voice, the conscience, the dæmon, the inherited moral sense, or whatever you like to call it, may possibly (in this sense of possible) degrade the larger self into which the smaller self will presently become re-absorbed. At the same time it is likely that the larger self would be able to take broader, probably wiser and probably more charitable, views of the part of itself that it has seen going astray on the earth—rather as a parent looks sadly but with charity on his son's misdemeanors at school. And while each of us here may be a part of some larger self or personality (perhaps more than one of us—conceivably, all of us—parts of the

same transcendental personality) it is not impossible that there may be even now other parts of the same greater self, personality, or consciousness passing through some form of existence in other universes of which we know nothing, each of these other parts, it may be, deeming, as most of us do, that it is a complete and separate self or personality; or again it may be that some of them may have some inkling, it may even be full knowledge, that they are but off-shoots or colonies, so to speak, of the larger personality. The universal personality or mind, to try another simile, may be as the wind blowing where it listeth, the individual personalities, or brains merely like the Æolian lyres on which it plays certain tunes for a while; and now and again, by favor of happy circumstances, the strings are so tight drawn that they catch notes of a rare and divine beauty, though as a rule they are too dull to respond to this divine *aura.* But, after all, it may be argued that this comes back at the end, when death breaks the lyre, to something so like personal

annihilation as to be indistinguishable from it. That is the trouble."

"And you 've put the Recording Angel entirely out of a job," I said flippantly, for my head had begun to whirl with his bewildering speculations before he had travelled more than half through them.

"Recording Angel!" he answered, cheerfully falling in with my own humor. "'Which I don't believe there's no such person.' Recording Angel, indeed! Recording devil, rather! It would make a devil of the best angel that ever was born to go on with that kind of mean work for all eternity—jotting down all the slips of unfortunate humanity.

"I have been looking up the Epictetus," he said, twisting a fetter of green bracken round the baby's ankle that should delay it just long enough in the undoing for him to find the place in the book "to refresh my mind about the passage I was speaking of at breakfast. He says that though from God come the seeds of all that is generated on the earth, yet the 'greatest and supreme and most comprehensive

community' is that which is 'composed of God and man'—curious notion is n't it? Of rational beings, he says that they only are formed to have communion with God, and have a consequent special right to call themselves sons of God, and points out how far this consideration ought to put us above fear of mundane troubles, and how far more valuable it is than kinship with Cæsar or any of the great ones of the earth.

"Marvellous altogether, is it not?" he said. "It is in the ninth chapter of the first book, and the translation is by George Long. Of course there is some of the jargon that we have outlived and outlearned—'conjoined by means of reason,' and so on; but the conception is more than a jargon—the whole conception of God as the one Father, Maker of all, the 'Great Companion' that Clifford talks about. It is a more liberal conception in a way than the modern one, which is held most liberal because it would seem to extend something of the communion with God to the lower animals too, to whom Epictetus does not

deny a beginning of reason. The last sentence of the passage, 'Shall not this release us from sorrows and fears?' is the keynote of all that ancient philosophy, and touches that which is most valuable in it—the importance that it assigns to tranquillity, self-control, and command—qualities more difficult for the Greek and Latin races than ours.

"He is wonderfully modern, this ancient Epictetus; and he has some splendid bits. I like his comparison of the works of Phidias and the other sculptors with the works of God. He allows the marble things all their glory—only he goes on: 'But the works of God have power of motion, they breathe, they have the faculty of using the appearances of things, and the power of examining them. *Being the work of such an Artist, do you dishonor Him?* And what shall I say, not only that He made you, but also entrusted you to yourself?' Epictetus will not have it—that old pagan—that the Great Artist has put His work into the world without a guide to show its feet how to go. For

this is what he says, after talking of the heavenly bodies and their movements, and so on: '"But I cannot," the man may reply, "comprehend all these things at once."' Epictetus will not listen to this excuse of helplessness. 'But who tells you,' he asks, 'that you have equal power with Zeus? Nevertheless he has placed by every man a guardian, every man's Dæmon, to whom he has committed the care of the man, a guardian who never sleeps, is never deceived. For to what better and more careful guardian could he have entrusted each of us? When then you have shut the doors and made darkness within, remember never to say that you are alone, for you are not; but God is within, and your Dæmon is within, and what need have they of light to see what you are doing?'

"You will not, I should think, want anything nearer the Christian idea of conscience than this. It is the still, small Voice, absolutely. Of course it may be said by those who argue on the materialistic side, that we of the modern science

have explained away this dæmon into something quite different. He has become the instinct evolved out of primordial matter by course of evolution, and by us inherited ready made, and a trouble it is no doubt that the dæmon which tells a Thug to go out and strangle a man is just about first cousin to the dæmon that tells the Missionary to go out and change the heart of the Thug—whence comes a conflict of dæmons. That is a trouble; but now in my own life I am come to a place in which neither dæmon nor any other sense of direction seems to guide me. I pray, I pray desperately hard, for direction, but it does not seem to come: what I pray to be told, believing as I do the main part of the Christian doctrine to be a delusion, is whether it is my duty to, whether it is God's will that I should, go down into the arena and fight the battle for what I believe to be truth, against this delusion—this delusion which, as I have said, brings to so many people so much happiness."

On this I felt that I had no answer to

give him. I went back to his previous point.

"There is only one thing," I said, in answer to his problem about the Thug and the Missionary that would convert the Thug, "only one supposition that could harmonize the apparent discord, and that is that the purpose of this life and the furtherance of the Great Design is fulfilled by each man doing that which his dæmon tells him is best; that, so doing, he achieves the best that is possible for him, the best that his circumstances, environment, heredity, education and all the rest of it permit to him here; that so he will mould as best he may what we call his 'character,' and that so, with this character formed, and capable who can say of what excellence (in spite of its grotesque manifestations in this life) he may go on into another life of quite other circumstances and environment, and there, in a clearer light, be a corner-stone of the Temple."

He replied that he wished that it might be so, but that character and habit seemed

to imply a machinery of nerves and brain.

Later in the day I walked with Mrs. Hood on the beautiful moorland. We passed in our walk a cottage in which, as Mrs. Hood told me, an old man was dying. As we went by the door we heard George Hood's voice within. He was reading. He saw us from his seat by the old man's bed and came out.

"How is old Baker?" Mrs. Hood asked.

"It is a matter of hours only," he said. "I don't think he will last till the morning. But he 's quite conscious and quite happy."

I asked him what he had been reading. He did not make answer to my first question, so I repeated it, indiscreetly.

"I was reading," he said with a little reluctance, "the chapter of St. John about the resurrection of the dead."

I felt ashamed of my insistence, but I was searching, with growing interest, for lights on my friend's character.

Gratuitously then he gave me a further light—or was it a further mystification?

"I have been doing something else," he said. "I have been sending a message to my sister who died. I have asked old Baker to take it to her."

I looked at him a moment to see whether he was in earnest. It appeared that he was so.

"Do you really believe in the possibility of such a thing?" I asked.

"In the possibility," he said, with emphasis on the word, "certainly. Whether I believe that it *can* be carried is another question. What do we mean by 'belief' after all?"

"It is an original idea, at all events," I said thoughtfully.

"Original! Oh no, it is not that. I cannot claim that for it. It was suggested to me first by something I read of General Gordon, 'Chinese' Gordon."

"General Gordon!"

"Yes, it was a clear, and to his mind quite a simple, conviction that any one dying could carry a message for you to another who had already passed through the big gates.

"You deem this notion of sending a message by one who is dying to one who has gone before a fantastic one," he went on; "but if you will think a little you will find, I am sure, that it is most rational and simple. If there is to be another life of the *ego*, of the conscious self, after death, it implies that the *ego* will retain a memory of its life on earth. On no other assumption can you say that it is the same *ego*, because the memory is the chief factor that binds the *ego* together, it is the chief factor in self-conscious identity. And without that self-conscious identity there is no real meaning, intelligible to human beings, in the idea of the life of the *ego* after terrestrial death. That being so, and granted that the dead take with them through the big gates the memory of their life here, what more natural than that they should be able to convey a message from the living on this side to the living on that? And what wonder if such a message should come as a great comfort? We may even imagine each newly dead surrounded by those who

have gone before, anxious to hear his news of affairs on the earth. Pure speculation, of course, but, I submit, not irrational speculation!"

"Tell me some more about General Gordon," I said. "Were you not indignant when he was sacrificed in the Soudan?"

"Indignant! Yes," he said musingly, "I suppose I was indignant. Was he sacrificed? I suppose he was sacrificed. No doubt, however, he sacrificed himself. When he went to the Soudan he believed, beyond question, that he went on a Divine mission, and would receive Divine help. But it is impossible to suppose that the Cabinet believed so. He was one of the most extraordinary men that ever lived in his absolute, unquestioning, fearless obedience to what Socrates and Epictetus call the Dæmon, the voice of God. He did not know fear, nor self-will, yet he had a temper, a violent temper. He was the worst possible servant of a Government, in a sense; for if his Dæmon advised him to act in a certain way, that

way he would take regardless of human instructions.

"There is, after all, but one rule of life, as it seems to me," he said, by way of summarizing the outcome of all our talk —I should rather say of all his talk—that afternoon, "but it is sufficient. It is that a man shall follow the voice within him, the voice that the Greeks called the 'dæmon,' and that the Christian calls the conscience. To each man there is given this guide, as I firmly believe, if he will but follow its promptings, although, as I have said, there is one problem in my life about which I have sought its guidance so far in vain. Even as you listen to it and obey it, its voice grows clearer; but, if a man will not obey or listen, the voice ceases to instruct. And this is the deadly sin—that a man sins against and disobeys the guidance that is given him, for by doing so he stifles the voice or blunts his faculties for its perception. And as for the rest, if there is a future life in which you and I and Gracia and the boy and the rest shall come to-

gether again—well ; but if there is not such a future life—again well, although less well. We gain nothing by all our striving to know. The truest faith is to rest content and grateful, although not knowing. As for eternity—it is futile to talk about it, for we can have no conception of it except as a very long time, whereas it is really only absence of time. And as for time, we know hardly more about it. We cannot conceive an end to time, any more than we can conceive eternity, for we can only talk of eternity as a time when there shall be no time, which is an absurd contradiction in terms. The furthest we can go in the conception is of a time when there shall be no more death —death, which is virtually the limit of our time—and, so doing, we have only come to the point at which the animals now are ; for, as I said before, to the best of our belief they live their lives from day to day as if they were in what it pleases me to call eternity, for they have no consciousness that their lives will end.

" I know nothing," he went on, " which

shows more convincingly the purely relative and inadequate notion that we have of time than the thought that if we were in one of those stars whose light takes many hundreds of years to reach us, and were endowed with infinite power of vision, we should see the things not that are happening to-day, but the things that were happening so many hundreds of years ago; and further that, if we were travelling away from the earth just a little faster than light travels, and were endowed with this infinite vision (all of which, though of course utterly impossible, is perfectly conceivable), we should see things on the earth happening in their reverse order—the horses racing in the Derby going backward to the starting point; the shells, instead of pouring into Port Arthur from the Japanese guns, going backward from the fort into the cannon, and so on—you may multiply the instances as your imagination suggests."

CHAPTER VII

JIM LEE, THE GYPSY

THE following morning I was awakened early by a strange voice. It was the voice of a man talking in tones of petulant anger, and the other parties to the conversation were Tio and, occasionally, the youth. I could gather from the tones that some kind of dispute was going on, but the talk was in what I presumed to be the gypsy dialect, for I could hardly understand a word of it. I was just on the point of getting out of my bunk to see what was the matter when the voices became less distinct and the men moved away, and soon I dozed off again and only awoke to be in time to wash and dress for breakfast.

"You had a visitor last night, had n't you?" I asked Hood in course of the meal.

"Yes," he said. "Did you hear him? I hope he did n't disturb you?"

"Only in the morning," I said, "when I ought to have been up. Who was it?"

"It was Jim Lee, a friend of ours. He came in rather far gone in beer. He had been at the horse-fair at Groombridge. He knew he was boozy and came out here to try to walk it off, but he had had more than he could carry. When he woke up in the morning he was in terrible trouble; he bought a couple of colts from a farmer yesterday for fifty pounds. He knew he was boozy at the time, so he gave all his notes to the farmer and told him to take fifty pounds from them. That is the last thing he remembers about it; and when he woke up this morning all his notes were gone—clean."

"But, fifty pounds!" I said. "He gave that for two colts! How much had he altogether, then?"

"He had five hundred altogether — to start with, that is. The farmer should have taken fifty—that would leave him four hundred and fifty."

"But five hundred pounds! Do you mean to say any man would go about with that sum of money all in notes on him?" Who is he, anyway, this Jim Lee?"

"Oh, he is a gypsy."

"But five hundred pounds! Have many of them as much money as that? And do they always carry it about with them?"

"Well, you see," said Hood, "they don't have a bank and a cheque-book—not as a rule at least—and if you have n't got that, and want to be spending any money, you have to carry it about with you. Besides, where would they put it that it could be safer? As a rule, they carry it in a pocket inside their waistcoats. If you were to ask old Tio I dare say he 'd tell you he 's got a pretty good sum in his inside waistcoat, has n't he, Gracia?"

She shook her head. "He 's not got very much just now. He 's bought two cottages quite lately."

"Cottages!" I said. "Where?"

"At Crewkerne," she said, "away in the West; the other side of the Forest."

"That 's the New Forest," Hood explained.

"And do you mean to go and live in them?" I asked.

"No, no," she said, with a laugh at the question, in which Hood joined. "We don't mean to live in houses, Tio and I."

"A good many of the gypsies own cottages and small houses," Hood explained. "It is their favorite form of investment, but they never live in any of them. They can't, for one thing."

"Can't live in them?"

"Not very well. They get ill when they try. It affects their spirits and actually their lungs. We tried it once—did n't we, Gracia?—and it was n't altogether a success."

CHAPTER VIII

DAWN OF THE SECOND MOOD

It was quite early in the summer that I paid my visit to George Hood in the country. For some time afterwards I did not see him. He did not come to the club, or, if he did so, it was always in my absence, and inquiry from the hall-porter showed that he had hardly been there. I concluded that he was with his caravan and small family circle, travelling as fancy moved them. I contrasted the life with my own in the hot, crowded town, and did not find the comparison in my favor.

Towards the end of the London season I had been dining alone at the club, and one of the members asked me to go with him to a box at the play which had been given him by the actor-manager. The piece was one of those musical operettas with

slight plot, to which one pays as much or as little attention as one likes. Generally they have a catchy song or two, and for the rest there is nothing that one remembers of them. We reached our box about the middle of the first act, and on looking down at the stalls I was much surprised to see George Hood in the second row. Like a good many others in the house, he was paying slight attention to the stage, and at the moment that I caught sight of him was obviously so fully engrossed in talk with the neighbor on his right, that for all he knew of it no performance might have been acted at all.

"Who is that George Hood is talking to—in the second row?" I asked my companion, who was one of those who made it a duty to know every one and everything.

"That?" he said in a tone of surprise; "don't you know who that is? That is Miss Whatman, the beautiful Olga Whatman, American, Philadelphian, twenty thousand a year—pounds, not dollars, and not in Chicago sausages either—real estate, as they call it—wonderfully clever girl,

learned and all that, but good company, too. Come over here to marry a duke, I suppose, like all the rest of them. That 's L—— on the other side of her. He 's going to be a duke when his father dies, which he ought to do soon by all rights. That 's what he 's brought here for to-night, no doubt—to marry Miss Whatman. But the lady seems more taken up with our friend for the moment, don't she? "

" I did n't know Hood was in town," I said. " I wonder how long he 's been up? "

" In town! Why, he 's been here all the season. Don't you know he 's been dancing attendance on Miss Whatman ever since she came over? Where have you been that you don't hear these things? "

" I have n't been anywhere that it 's fashionable to be," I said, " that 's quite clear. And I suppose that George Hood has. I 've never seen him in the club for ages."

" That 's so, my dear fellow. These American ladies are exigeant. They make

terrible wives. If Hood does marry her, he 'll find he 's caught a Tartar, I expect."

"Oh! he——" ("He can't," I was about to say, but then I checked myself in time. I knew that Hood wished me to regard as confidential my knowledge of his domestic matters.) "He 's not likely to do that, I should think," I ended lamely.

"You never can tell," my friend said, sagely. "George Hood 's a curious fellow. He has curious tastes and ways—not like the ordinary British ruffian that we meet every day, you know. That sort of thing has attractions for a woman, and they do say that the beautiful Miss Olga is very much taken up with him. He 's clever, of course, in his way, and so is she. Of course, there 's a big competition. She 's become quite the fashion, and of course twenty thousand a year and a real beauty —she 's got ancestors, too, more than most Americans—don't go begging for want of asking. Still, I believe Hood 's first favorite for the stakes. Look at them

now. The duke that is to be, and marquis that is, has got to do all his talking to the old Miss Whatman aunt, on the other side."

My gossipy friend relapsed into a silence, and gave his attention to the stage after this historiette; but I had my drama now—a far more interesting one than that we had come to see. I had front seats for it. It was a drama that was not without its pathos as I thought of that transcendently beautiful creature with the dumb, dog-like eyes in the caravan. At that moment the heroine of the piece came on the stage for the song of the evening, with topical references and all the rest of it, to be encored again and again. At that moment, too, Hood glanced up and met my eyes full upon him. At the distance it was not certain that he could recognize me, and for the time being I could not tell whether or no he had done so. But he gave his attention to the song. He ceased suddenly from talking in his engrossed way to his companion. She, too, turned to the stage,

and I could study in profile her face, which before had been nearly full towards us. It was a refined, delicate face, with that vivacity of expression that the Americans often possess. In beauty of color and classic perfection of feature, it bore no more comparison with that astonishing countenance of Hood's wife than a rush-light to the sun, in the trite simile; but here the relatively insignificant features were alive with the play of mind. Her hair was of the color of ripe corn.

I recalled, and smiled at the recollection, Hood's description to me, in early days of our friendship, of a small and very select dinner party where the hostess was a would-be soulful and clever woman with fair hair. After detailing the boredom of the party, with whimsical humor, Hood had concluded: "D——n all clever women. D——n all sandy women. D——n all sandy clever women." Yet here was one whom in his whimsical mood he might quite well describe in just these terms, but he did not look as if he was at all disposed to d——n her.

During the rest of the play he did not at any time appear to become, to the same degree as before, engrossed in his talk with the American, and once or twice it even seemed to me that she was a little piqued with him for the attention that he gave to the stage. She transferred some of her doubtless sparkling conversation to the rising duke, but possibly he did not bear his part brilliantly, for their talks were not prolonged. We left before the end of the piece, so that there was no likelihood of seeing Hood as we came out.

The following day it seemed only natural that I should meet him at the club. He had not been there for weeks before, although I now knew that he had been in London; yet this day I had a feeling that it was sure he would be there.

"I had to come," he said, without greeting me in any other formula and without any handshake. "I had to come to see you: I want to talk to you. I saw you at the theatre last night. For days and weeks I have not come here in order to

avoid you. But now I must see you and talk to you, although nothing has happened; nothing, except that you saw me at the theatre. I want to talk."

"Well," I said, "here I am. Talk away."

"No, not here; that would not do. We should be interrupted. I hate a club. I I could not talk to you here—not as I want to. What are you doing to-night?"

"I am dining out," I said. "That is all. I could come on to you afterwards if you like. I suppose I shall get away at eleven or so."

"That would do; it is very good of you." He spoke with an agitated gratitude at my acquiescence, as he had before spoken with an agitated earnestness of entreaty that I should consent to act as audience to him.

"Where are your rooms?" I asked.

He gave me a queer address in Chelsea. "You drive along the King's Road till the horse drops," he said. "It 's there."

I happened to be dining in the Kensington direction, so the meeting was less

inconvenient than it might have been. Soon after eleven, by dint of questioning of policemen and loafers of various kinds, the cabman arrived at what he appeared to think must be the street and the number I had given him. The wall of the house looked singularly blank and unresponsive, as walls without windows do, but it had at least a door and a bell. The bell was answered after much waiting by a female who seemed of the charwoman species. I asked for Mr. Hood, and, when she had inspected me for a while with an unfavorable eye, she consented to usher me down a long stone passage till we came opposite a door, at which she knocked with resonant energy, and saying briefly, "That 's him," ambled off down the further depths of the ill-lighted space. The door was opened by Hood himself, who took my hand gratefully.

"I was afraid you would n't come," he said.

"Why?" I asked, rather naturally surprised.

"Because I wanted so much to see you.

I hardly know what I should have done if you had n't come."

"But what a surprising place this is!" I said, looking about me.

The room was large and lofty, lighted apparently by a window in the roof during the daytime, but for the moment by electric burners agreeably shaded to throw a subdued rose-colored radiance. The walls were hung with tapestries representing hunting scenes of the Middle Ages. The floor had a rich Persian carpet, into which one's feet sank deliciously. In one corner a drugget was spread upon it, and on this stood an easel apparently carrying a canvas, but a sheet bearing innumerable paint stains was thrown over it and hid the picture, if there were one, from present inspection. No pictures were on the walls, but against the tapestry, and in admirable keeping with it, suits of iron armor reflecting the glow of the light. The mantelpiece was of finely carved marble, presumably Italian of the sixteenth century in design, and over it hung an arrangement of old weapons and helmets.

There were several carved wood cabinets, of the same date as the mantelpiece, bearing beautiful bronzes. Even the electric-light fittings were of iron-work of the same best period of Italian workmanship, adapted to this essentially modern use. Only the sofas and chairs were of the newest and most luxurious pattern. It was a room to wonder at anywhere, and especially after the drive to this obscure street, and the old dame, shuffling down the dim stone passage, for usher.

"How did you find such a place?" I asked.

"I found the place by accident," he answered, carelessly, "and, of course, all these things I put into it."

"Yes," I said, "I did not suppose they belonged to furnished apartments."

"I had to ask you to come and see me," he said, reverting to the subject that evidently was besetting his mind. "I had to talk to you, to tell you. I had to tell somebody. Have you ever felt like that about anything?"

"I have felt like it, I think," I admitted.

"I do not know that I have ever quite yielded to the feeling. And always, I may tell you, also, I have been glad, afterwards that I have not yielded. I want to tell you this, because I want you to think well before you tell me whatever it is that you were going to. I fancy you are sure to regret telling me afterwards, if you do tell."

"Do you know what I think?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"That if you wanted to say a word that would make me still more anxious to confide in you it would be just what you have said to me now—this caution."

"Well," I answered, laughing, "that was not my intention. I did not mean to be so subtle. I meant simply what I said."

"Yes," he replied, "I am sure you did." Then, after a pause, "One generally wants to tell this sort of thing to a woman does n't one?"

"I don't think I quite know what the sort of thing is yet," I said.

"Oh yes, I expect you do," he replied. "You have made guesses, at least, and I dare say they have not been far wrong."

There was nothing to answer to this. Naturally I had made guesses, and one usually presumes one's guesses to be more or less right. A long pause ensued. Apparently, although he was so anxious to talk to me, he was in no great hurry to begin. I wondered whether he was weighing my advice and debating the wisdom of the proposed confidence, and in spite of my word of warning I was conscious of sufficient human curiosity to hope that he did not mean to take it.

"Has it happened to you," he asked—"but of course it has, I need not have put it in the form of a question—going down a staircase or a passage in a strange house, to come suddenly face to face with a figure that is quite strange to you, in some ways the strangest figure, as it seems to you, in the world, because it is so like something that you know, and yet so unlike? Of course it is yourself that you

have suddenly come face to face with in a mirror; and to see yourself thus is something like a betrayal. To find yourself with such an expression on your face! To realize that it is thus that you must appear to others! It shows you your real self, for an instant; and it shows you, too, how unlike this real self is to the face that you put on that self when you know beforehand that you are about to meet it in a mirror. Well, something very similar to that happens to me often when something occurs to give me an unexpected look at my real moral self. Sometimes it is something in a book—I think George Meredith is the great revealer—he and Balzac—and sometimes it is something that I have done or felt without much reflection on its moral meaning, and suddenly have become conscious of, in its real significance. We cannot make life happy, but we can always make it interesting, if we choose; for when we have done wondering at our fellow creatures we must be fearfully dull if we cannot find plenty of surprises in ourselves. I

have been surprising myself a good deal in that way lately, I assure you."

I began to think that he was going to take my hint of caution and to withhold from me the confidence that I had advised him not to make. I need not have feared the disappointment. Even as I felt myself smiling at the human weakness of curiosity in which I had detected myself he began.

"You are the only one that knows," he said—"about Gracia, I mean. The only one of people in London—of the people we know. I married Gracia," he went on, "because I loved her. I suppose you may think that a sufficiently natural explanation—hardly worth the making, perhaps. What I mean is that I loved her truly, deeply, passionately—oh, yes, passionately, but the love was more than passion. That is what I want you to understand. It was—it is—a true, deep affection, besides. She is wonderful."

"She is," I agreed cordially.

"Ah, you do not know her," he said quickly, as if rebuking my presumption.

"You know her, of course, as a very beautiful woman; no one could fail to recognize that. But she has qualities, extraordinary qualities. She is not a bit like other women."

"No, I should not think she is," I assented.

"She has wonderful qualities, but they are all of the heart, of the temperament. They are not those of the head, of the mind. Do you know what I think they are most like?" He rose up as he spoke, and began agitatedly walking to and fro on the noiseless carpet. "They are most like — you will not misunderstand — like those of a very trusting, faithful dog."

"Yes," I said, "I quite understand what you mean."

"There is this about Gracia that is so wonderful," he went on. "I leave her down there, there in that caravan—it is the life she loves best, you know; in fact, the only one that she can live with any comfort—and when I come back to her, what do you think she does? You have seen for yourself. She does not assail

me with a flood of questions, as another woman would; she does not ask me where I have been, what I have been doing, whom I have seen. She asks none of these things. She does not care to know. Or perhaps she does not think she would understand if I were to tell. At all events she does not ask. That is what is so wonderful."

"She trusts you so perfectly," I ventured to say, as he paused.

"My God, she does!" he replied with a vehemence that startled me. "She trusts me so perfectly. And she has had every reason to. She has had—yes."

He paused again. I knew that the crucial point of the confession was coming, and knew too that, however much the unburdening himself of it had become a necessity to him, the final telling must be hard.

"And she always shall be able to trust me," he continued. "In the vulgar sense, yes—I shall never be unfaithful to her—at least, if I know myself I shall not. If I were to be unfaithful to her, and to come

back to her, pretending, those eyes of hers would kill me with the shame of it. If I ever should, I would first break with her, tell her. What do you think she would do," he asked suddenly, "if I were to?"

I thought over this for a while before I answered, but I might as well not have thought, for all I found to say was, "I really cannot tell."

He laughed in a forced way. "And, do you know," he said, "no more can I."

It interested me to find that my beautiful enigma was an enigma even to him.

"Sometimes I think she would care," he said, "for I do believe she loves me; and then again I think it impossible that she should care—for that or for anything—impossible that anything could move to emotion a nature so calm."

After a pause he went on: "But, after all, is that the most serious unfaithfulness—that only sort of which the law takes any note? Is it not even worse if a man takes from the woman to whom they are due the best of his thoughts, sympathies, aspirations, and offers them to another?"

"It is possible to put the question in another way," I suggested, "and ask, 'Is it to be supposed that one woman will be able to appreciate, bring out, respond to, all that is best in all the different sides of a man's nature?' Put the question in that way, and you will find a different answer ready for it."

"You are suggesting a kind of polygamy of the soul."

"If you care to put it like that. But, after all, to come back to the concrete. In your own case would it be possible for the one woman to respond to the more intellectual, æsthetic—call it what you will—side of your own nature?"

"That is just it, that is just it," he replied eagerly. "It is nothing, to her, all this one side—the higher side, as we call it—of human nature, at least of cultivated human nature. What, then, am I to do? Am I to be bound? Am I to keep that which is best in me down, to cripple it, for the sake of being true to a vow? Am——"

"Or for the sake of pity for a woman

who loves you, and that woman the most beautiful in the world"—I interrupted him.

I was a little ashamed of the part I had played, for I had put in its best light that which I felt (I felt, rather than argued) to be worst. At least, there was the vow. My friend of the intellectual and æsthetic soul was married (I at all events understood and believed him to be married) to the marvellously beautiful goddess of the van. The sacredness of the marriage vow ought to be a fundamental sanctity at the bottom of all social foundation. One could not lightly play the devil's advocate against that. And yet here was a case of a man married to one woman to whom all the intellectual and æsthetic side was nothing. To her it was nothing; therefore, in giving this to another woman, he was taking nothing—just no more and no less than nothing—from the other. Was there unfaithfulness in this? Was any one one penny the worse?

But this was casuistry. With a marriage vow in one scale of the balance there ought to be no consideration that could

weigh in the other. That is what inherited and acquired principle said. And there was always this consideration further: my friend never, he said, would be unfaithful, in the vulgar sense, to his goddess of the van; but he qualified this brave assertion with a proviso—"if he knew himself." Did he know himself? One had to ask that always. Does a man ever know, when he goes on these paths, where they are to lead him; and is not the most fertile ground of a man's surprises his own strange heart?

Curious though, when this man had summoned me to hear his confession, that I should be the one who was excusing him, finding him reasons, he condemning himself! For that was the way of it. Of course the discussion ran into the morning hours, with some, but not all, names given, details mentioned, dots put on "i's," and so on; but none of all that matters. There was the fact: my friend stood at the crisis; he had made his confession; he was no nearer the solution by reason of having made it. But he

had made it in response to the stern necessity that comes at times to men, and more often to women, of telling his trouble, of getting some one to share the burden. The trouble would be lighter for a while, of course, after his telling it. I knew that. I knew also that it would recur just as strongly as ever, and that then, very likely, he would regret bitterly that he ever had told. I had warned him of that probability at the outset, before the telling; but he would take no heed. So that phase of the drama was done, and I went home, in the glimmering dawn, very sleepy.

"Man is put into this world," he had argued, "with certain responsibilities; but the chief of all the responsibilities is himself, that he should make the best possible of his own clay and the soul that animates it." That, a categorical imperative of egoism, was the phrase that summed the question up. Was that, after all, the first duty of man? I was very sleepy. The answer could wait at least till the morrow.

CHAPTER IX

GEORGE HOOD'S FATHER

THE very next day Hood came to my rooms almost before I had finished breakfast. For a little while he fidgeted about, obviously uneasy; then he said abruptly:

"I thought you would think it curious that in all our talk last night we said nothing about Miss Whatman."

"Did we not say anything about her? I thought we had referred to her, more or less directly, pretty often."

"More or less directly, yes—chiefly less. And that was the better way. But a point that we never touched on was how far I was free to—well, let me say it, to marry her."

"You seemed to treat the question as if you were perfectly free," I said.

"As if I were perfectly free—yes, that is

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how I did wish to put it to you, for the purpose of discussion. I am so—legally free."

"It was only a form of speech and courtesy when you introduced Gracia to me as your wife?" I hazarded.

"Not entirely. And that is partly what I wished to speak to you again about. Gracia and I were married, according to Spanish gypsy rites. And now I must ask you to understand that that form of marriage has just as much moral effect for me as if we had been married in a church, no more and no less."

"That is to say, it has virtually none."

"No," he said, "that is not an exact way of putting it, because to Gracia it represents a perfectly binding agreement. It is the recognition of that that makes it something of a bond for me also. If I were untrue to it, it would be a breach of a covenant that she regards as sacred. That is the moral position."

"And the legal?"

"There is no question of that. Legally I am absolutely free. That is a point

that I wished to make clear to you. That is why I treated the situation as I did in our talk last night. There is no legal bond, no legal obstacle to my marrying any free woman."

I said nothing. I thought several things, but none of them, if spoken, would have made for pleasant relations between us. As I said nothing he added: "And that very fact makes me feel the moral bond between myself and Gracia so much the stronger."

The addendum took from me all wish to say the things that had been in my mind the moment before. The strange friendship between us, imperilled for a brief space, stood re-established on its old basis.

He was silent for a long while after this, and I did not interrupt. I saw that he was hard at work thinking, and one does not interrupt a train of thought that one expects to end with some interesting word. It was very seldom that he disappointed an expectation of the kind, but I must say that I had looked for something very

different from the remark that came: "I want you to know my father."

There was at least this merit in my strange friend—the thing that he said was seldom to be forecasted: but this amiable wish that I should see his father surprised me the more, because I failed altogether to perceive by what hooks it hung to the talk that had gone before. I so often failed to see the hooks, however, that I ought to have ceased to feel surprise. It was the first time that he ever had mentioned his father to me. I knew by hearsay that he had a father, but a less domestic man, a man more independent of family ties, it was not easy to imagine; for one could hardly call the wonderful woman of the caravan and the brown baby a tie.

The barest courtesy would have obliged me to say that I should be pleased to know his father, even if it were not true; and it was absolutely true that I had become keenly interested in every "light," so to call it, that could help me to an understanding of this quaint fellow who had so

quaintly become my friend. I had grown to regard him as a problem, a problem that I wished to solve chiefly because of the difficulty of the solution.

We arranged details of the visit. His father lived in the country—not in a van, as he told me with a smile. We went down for the proposed visit on the Saturday following the day on which he had suggested it, travelling by a fast train to Ipswich, then on by a train that crawled, and stopped at all the little wayside stations. At one of the smallest of them we got out, and found a brougham waiting for us with a coachman and footman. It was not until we were in the brougham that Hood told me anything of the party we were to meet or the nature of our probable reception.

"There will be no one there," he said. "Only my father. You must not be surprised if you do not find him very demonstrative. I am not on very good terms with him."

It did not sound cheery. I should have preferred the caravan. But after all it

might possibly be interesting. Our visit was for the "week-end," as it is the fashion to call it, only. We were to return on the Monday. If it were to be a bore, at least it would be soon over.

The house was square, of red brick, here and there relieved by white stone facing — an ugly house. But it looked substantial and comfortable. The interior confirmed the impression of the outside. There were soft carpets, heavy, good, furniture, abundance of light, of servants, of all that goes to make for solid comfort, and indicates that money is not considered. Our host did not appear, to welcome us, and we went to our rooms to dress. When I came down to the drawing-room before dinner I found my friend talking with a man whom at the first glance I should not have taken to be much older than himself; for, though his face was of an astonishing and almost deathlike pallor, his figure had the slightness that suggests comparative youth. He might have been a man only entering middle life, on whom chronic delicacy has set its pathetic mark.

Hood introduced me to him as his father, and by the first words of formal courtesy with which he greeted me his voice seemed at once to betray his age. It was the thin broken voice of a man whose vital tide is on the ebb.

During dinner the talk was of the most general nature, and indifferently sustained. Father and son discussed the questions of the day in politics and the like commonplace subjects rather as if they had been coevals but slightly acquainted with each other than related as I knew them to be. My anticipation that the visit might not prove cheery seemed in course of fulfilment, but still the situation was an interesting one to study. The dinner was short and simple, but perfectly cooked, served on fine plate and table linen and handed by a butler and two footmen. Our host drank water, but claret, port, and liqueur with the coffee were served to George Hood and myself, and all were of the best in their different kind. After dinner Mr. Hood sat with us for half an hour or so, smoking a cigarette or two,

and then, with an excuse that his health obliged him to go to bed early, left us to our own devices. There was a studied coldness and formality, with perfect courtesy, in his demeanor to his son; and to myself, as his son's friend, he adopted the same manner, which might, for all I knew, be characteristic of him in all his dealings with his fellow men. His fine marble face never once relaxed into a smile throughout the glacial evening. It was like the face of an inscrutable sphinx, worn, it might be by constant pain, into an expression of suffering immobility.

"Well," said George Hood, when he had sat for some moments in silence after our host had left us, "now you know my father."

"I beg your pardon," I said, "I cannot presume to say that I know him in the very least."

Hood laughed his dry laugh. "You do not know him?" he said. "No. No more do I.

"He is not exactly the sort of man you would choose for a father, is he?" he

asked, as I made no reply to his last remark.

"It is not a choice that is often given one."

"What I cannot quite make out," he said, "is how far I am to blame for my father being as he is."

"No?" I said. "I do not quite understand."

"Naturally. I will explain. In the first place I must tell you—what will surprise you—that my father is a man of a fearfully violent temper. He controls it, up to a point, under an appearance of perfect immobility of feature and expression; but when that point is passed he loses control utterly. His temper gets absolute possession of him. It really is like a demoniacal possession. Unhappily for me, and for him—not unhappily perhaps for her—my mother died when I was born, and I was left with him, his only child, for him to educate. Well, you can perhaps imagine the life better than I can describe it. There were times when he was kind to me. Indeed he was generally

how I did wish to put it to you, for the purpose of discussion. I am so—legally free."

"It was only a form of speech and courtesy when you introduced Gracia to me as your wife?" I hazarded.

"Not entirely. And that is partly what I wished to speak to you again about. Gracia and I were married, according to Spanish gypsy rites. And now I must ask you to understand that that form of marriage has just as much moral effect for me as if we had been married in a church, no more and no less."

"That is to say, it has virtually none."

"No," he said, "that is not an exact way of putting it, because to Gracia it represents a perfectly binding agreement. It is the recognition of that that makes it something of a bond for me also. If I were untrue to it, it would be a breach of a covenant that she regards as sacred. That is the moral position."

"And the legal?"

"There is no question of that. Legally I am absolutely free. That is a point

that I wished to make clear to you. That is why I treated the situation as I did in our talk last night. There is no legal bond, no legal obstacle to my marrying any free woman."

I said nothing. I thought several things, but none of them, if spoken, would have made for pleasant relations between us. As I said nothing he added: "And that very fact makes me feel the moral bond between myself and Gracia so much the stronger."

The addendum took from me all wish to say the things that had been in my mind the moment before. The strange friendship between us, imperilled for a brief space, stood re-established on its old basis.

He was silent for a long while after this, and I did not interrupt. I saw that he was hard at work thinking, and one does not interrupt a train of thought that one expects to end with some interesting word. It was very seldom that he disappointed an expectation of the kind, but I must say that I had looked for something very

lied, as to what I had done or had not done, in order to escape his anger, and often I succeeded in escaping it. But often again I was found out, and then it was terrible. It is then that I wonder sometimes that he did not kill me. Of course, when my reputation as a liar was established in his mind, there was no hope for me. Nothing that I did was right, nothing that I said was not suspected. If I had been of a harder, less sensitive character, I should less often have caused him anger, I think, and perhaps in that way I have to consider myself in some degree responsible for aggravating his sufferings."

"It seems to me you are too self-critical," I said.

"Goodness me!" he exclaimed irritably. "Do you suppose I do not know that? Have you only just found it out? It has been my curse through life, the reason of all my indecisions—this fatal habit of self-criticism, introspection, doubt of my own motives, and all the miserable train that follows. Amongst that train is

the occasional fit of obstinacy—not in the least because one sees clearly that the course in which one persists is so eminently right (often indeed one sees quite clearly that it is wrong), but simply as a kind of disgusted revolt and reaction from one's indecisions. It is an attempt to delude oneself into the idea that one is strong—rather as a weak man physically (my father let us say) may clench his fist and feel his biceps to try to give himself the idea that he is not a weakling after all."

"It seems to me that you have taken one fairly decisive step in your life, at all events," I said.

"You mean my—Gracia?"

I nodded. "Of course," he said, resuming his parable without further attention to my interruption—"of course, as I grew up, the absolute physical fear of my father passed away—it seems absurd, does it not? to speak of physical fear of anything so delicately frail as he is—but all the consequences on my own character remained. I was introspective, as I have

said, ultra-sensitive, prone to endless examination of my own motives. There were comparatively few outbreaks of temper on my father's part of which I was not the cause, until the most fearful of them all arrived as a consequence—I suppose a most natural consequence — of my telling him that I was married to Gracia."

"You told him—that?"

"Yes," he said, fully understanding the significance of my question. "I told him —that."

"Naturally," he resumed, "I had told him nothing beforehand. What would have been the good? It would merely have meant outbursts of passion very bad for him, and certainly of no use or pleasure to me. Besides, there was not much 'beforehand.' I went into this, as into most of the other important things of my life, almost without intending it, without calculation (or at least, if not that, for I had calculated the *pros* and the *cons* over and over again, without definite resolve). I was hurried into it, or I hur-

ried myself into it, at the last. I told him nothing beforehand."

"And then you told him that—that you were married?"

"Yes, I told him that. Again I hardly knew, I had not made up my mind, what precisely I should tell him; I hardly knew even whether it was right to call it marriage. It was, after all, a form of marriage; I recognized it as being as sacred as I could recognize any other form to be. You will say, again, that means 'not sacred at all!' You are a scoffer. At all events I told him I was married—it seemed simpler to state it so, at starting; there were such difficulties about explaining exactly what had taken place. So I stated it, meaning, so far as I had a meaning in my mind, to clear up the position afterwards; and then he gave me little chance to speak—his passion was so fearful and so voluble—and of such chance as he did give me to explain I was not much inclined to avail myself, because he made the position impossible for me. He told me he would disown me altogether

unless I cast off this wife—'this vagrant, this tramp,' so on, and so on—told me he would cut me out of his will, and so on. In a word, my pride was roused; one of those fits of stubborn obstinacy which are the reactions of a naturally weak nature took me. I shut my mouth, and to this day he believes I am married to Gracia in the firmest legal bond."

"But he has not disavowed you?" I said.

"Formally, no. You see the terms we are on. As a son, he has practically disavowed me. As an acquaintance, he tolerates me still. I am permitted to invite myself here, to invite a friend here—you have seen our welcome! But he has entirely cut me out of his will, except to the extent of five hundred a year which is settled on me; and my present allowance is five hundred a year. Before, before I told him of my 'marriage,' it was practically anything I pleased. He is a very rich man."

"And whom is his money to go to?"

George Hood shrugged his shoulders. "Can't say—home for lost dogs."

"But if you were to tell him you were not married?"

"That is just it. That is just it. That is just what I brought you down here to consult you about. What if I were to tell him I were not married? What then? And could I tell him so?"

"Of course you could tell him so," I replied. "Would it not be the truth?"

"Would it not be the truth? Yes. But would it not be an infamy—towards Gracia, an infamy. Tell me that, my friend. Tell me the truth."

"Do you think that a man commonly wants the truth when he asks it of you like that?"

"I don't know what I want," he cried desperately. I want help—help."

"I suppose you know why you have come down here just now?" I said.

"No," he replied, "I don't."

"And why you have brought me down with you?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you. You have come down here in order to tell your father you are not married, and you have brought me down with you in order that I may tell you you are right in doing so."

"Is all that so?" he asked, searching in his mind to see if he found there what I told him. He did not deny it.

"And do you know why it is that you have come down just at this time, after so many years of silence, to tell your father that you are free and not married?" I was determined to spare him nothing, so that he never should plead later that he had acted, or that I had advised him, in ignorance of his motives.

He did not answer this question audibly, but turned his head away and shook it. He knew the answer perfectly, but I had to put it into words for him: "It is because you no longer wish to think of yourself as married. It is because you wish to think of yourself as free. It is because"—I hesitated a moment, for this last was a hard thing to have to say to a man, and one could not tell how he might

take it—" it is because you wish to be put into a position, financially, to be able to marry."

I thought for an instant that he was about to resent my words. He started in indignation; but then his indignation was quelled by the absolute truth of my accusation. He gave a helpless groan.

" It is quite true," he said, " quite true. That is exactly the despicable kind of thing I am."

" And now," I said, " now that we have established that fact so pleasantly, and are under no delusions as to what we are talking about, now I will give you my advice on the matter, since you have asked it. It is the advice that you wish, the advice that you will take; for it is advice to follow the course that you would have taken whether my advice had been for or against it; it is that you should go to your father and tell him the truth, and the whole truth. Tell him, if you like, that the reason you did not tell it him long ago was that you regarded the bond as sacred—equally binding with a

marriage ceremony at the altar. If you do not suppose that he will listen with sufficient forbearance for you to get the whole tale told succinctly, then I should be inclined to write it all. The great thing is to make sure that now, at last, he should be put in possession of the whole story, all clearly set out, with no dark or mysterious corners left in it. Let there be, so far as possible, an end of all misunderstanding. That is my advice to you, and it is advice, as I say, that you will take."

"You know a great deal about me," he said thoughtfully.

"There is a good deal more that I don't know—that I should like to know," I replied.

"Heavens and earth, I should hope there is! It would be a dreadful thing if a man's soul gave up the whole stock of its secrets to any man, or woman either. Even to itself it has secret places. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, it has been said; but the heart has secrets that it does not tell even to its owner.

"Apart from the question of motive, however," he went on, as I found no ready reply to these philosophical comments, "you think I should do right to tell my father that I am not, strictly and legally speaking, married?"

"I think you would do right," I said decidedly. "Indeed I am sure of it—from every point of view, right. What has not been right is that you should ever have told him, or should ever have allowed him to believe, that you were married. That is where the mistake has been."

"Yes, I know," he said. "I have known it all along, really. Of course it has been only my confounded pride—false pride, no doubt, and obstinacy—that has prevented my telling him long ago. It gave me a kind of satisfaction to let him go on in this mistake that gave him so much annoyance. There is no doubt of it that at times the devil has possession of me."

"And keeps possession for some while, as it seems," I said.

"But to-morrow I will tell him—yes, to-morrow. It will be interesting at all events, will it not, to see how he takes it? You will not be bored with your visit, I think."

"Certainly I shall not," I replied with truth. "I am very greatly interested."

"And you had expected to be very badly bored, had you not?"

"You seem to know a good deal about me too," I said, laughing.

"There is one point," I said finally, "which no doubt you have considered. When you avow yourself unmarried you avow at the same time a *liaison* of a highly irregular nature. How do you suppose that your father will be affected by that news?"

"It will affect him not at all," Hood rejoined with confidence. "His views of morality are far from rigid. I think, if they had been more orthodox, or if my mother had lived, I might perhaps have hesitated more before I—engaged myself to Gracia."

"Ah, well," I said, "from the point of

view of what you have to tell your father, that is all as it should be wished. It removes a difficulty."

Then we began to talk of matters that do not touch the story, and so the time passed till we went to bed.

CHAPTER X

"POOR GRACIA!"

THE morrow was a Sunday, a warm gray day with a colorless sky low down over the land. In the morning I wandered out from the house over the stretch of links by which the pasture lands were bordered, and so to a low range of sand-hills covered with the yellow marram. The tide was out, and long sand-flats stretched away to the rippling waters of the English Channel. The eerie cry of the seafowl came from the flats as the waders went hither and thither, seeking their insect food in the soft ooze. As I lay in a contemplative mood on the sand-hills I could imagine my friend's life as a solitary boy, with no mother, a father whom he dreaded, not without reason, and who was wholly unsympathetic with him. I could imagine

his long lonely rambles among the sand-hills facing the flat shore, and the influence that such surroundings would have on the mind of a sensitive child and boy, and therein seemed to find the key of much that was enigmatical in the character of this friend. Our host had not appeared at breakfast, and George Hood had told me that he seldom left his room till mid-day. I had gone out by myself in order to leave father and son together, and give every opportunity for the explanation which I did not doubt the son would take this occasion of making, and speculated vaguely on the manner in which it was likely to be received. That it would be acceptable, on the whole, was scarcely to be doubted; but at the same time it was natural to suppose that any parent, and especially one of so violent a temper as Hood had represented his father to be, would feel injured by the discovery that he had been for so long the victim of a delusion, of a mistake, of a false statement.

My anxiety was much relieved as I

approached the house on my return to see father and son walking together on the terrace, the former leaning on the arm of the latter, evidently in perfect amity. My host bade me "Good morning" with a friendliness that was in marked contrast with the icy courtesy of his manner on the previous evening. He was equally charming and friendly during luncheon, which followed almost immediately, so that it hardly needed the assurance which George Hood gave me in course of an afternoon stroll over the links to convince me that the father had received the news of his son's freedom from a bond which he could not but look on in the nature of a misalliance with so much relief that he readily pardoned the deception in which he had believed for so many years. His readiness to pardon it had made no little impression on his son, who was inclined to see in it an almost pathetic evidence of the father's loss of force.

"I could hardly believe," he said, in narrating the interview to me, "that I was talking to the same man that used to

flare out at me so, only a year or two ago. When I had explained all the truth to him, to which he listened with perfect patience, I tried to make him understand the motive, if indeed I had any motive clearly intelligible even to myself, that had induced me to leave him in this delusion; but he cut me short by saying in the most affectionate way, 'Oh yes, George, my dear boy, you need not explain it all to me. I know that I have often been a most impossible parent to you. I know it well. I can understand your difficulty.' I seem to myself to know my father now, as he really is, for the first time, and it frightens me to see him so. Nothing before has ever made me feel so strongly how ill he must be, how changed he is. He reminds me of some extinct volcano, with all its fire and fury quenched."

"Does it not rather tend to show that he is stronger, that he has a better control over himself and his irritable nerves?" I argued.

Hood shook his head sorrowfully. "I

wish I could see it in that light," he said. "But no, it seems to me almost as if the hand of death were already upon him; as if he had lost so much of his vital force —of his former self."

Do what I would, I could not argue my friend out of this mournful and almost morbid view of his father's state—a father for whom, as it seemed, he was only just beginning to be able to feel any real filial affection. He had wasted few words, as Hood had foreseen, in reprobating the irregular mode of life which his son had followed.

The rest of the afternoon and evening passed in the most pleasant manner, the mutual relations between father and son being far more cordial and natural than on the previous evening; and it seemed to me as if the host was anxious to show particular kindness to myself, in part, as I thought, to make up for his rather frigid reception, and in part as if attributing it to my good offices that his son had been brought into such a state of indifferent grace as to be able to avow the true posi-

tion between himself and Gracia. The kindliness of his manner I interpreted as a tacit recognition and returning of thanks for the service which he believed me to have rendered. I knew, of course, that I had done nothing in this respect to merit his gratitude, for I was convinced that George Hood had fully made up his mind to apprise his father of the true state of affairs, even had my advice been opposed to his doing so. But, in fine, the visit that had begun under such chilling auspices terminated in very friendly fashion to the mutual satisfaction of all the parties to it.

I had rather expected George Hood would stay on for a day or two with the father whom he seemed to have discovered now for the first time, but instead of doing so he accompanied me back to town, according to our original programme. I understood, however, that he had promised to come down again to visit his father at the next "week-end." On the way to London in the train we hardly exchanged a word, each of us keeping to his own corner and his own reflections. What George

Hood's may have been I could not know, although I fancied that I could shrewdly speculate. For the keynote of my own reflections, it may be expressed most briefly and most accurately in two words—"Poor Gracia!"

CHAPTER XI

IN THE NEW FOREST

A WEEK or two later the wheels of happy chance took me, on a bicycle, to that wild garden land of England which we call the New Forest. Thither I went by chance, or in search of pleasant scenes and good roads for the bicycle, but I may admit, without prejudice, that I was attracted in part by the hope that I might hear news of the caravan and George Hood's wife—for thus in my mind I still would call her—that marvellously lovely lady. I knew, from what Hood himself had told me, that his household had been moving, in its leisurely fashion, westward, with "the forest," as all the wandering community call it, as its bourne; and, as I expected, a little conversation with some of the van folk who frequent the highways of the New

Forest in such numbers soon gave me the news I wanted, and indicated where I should find the party in which I was interested. I did not stay to ask myself the nature of that interest. I had a desire, that was not wonderful, to look once more on the most beautiful face that my eyes had ever seen, and promised myself some pleasure in paying a call of ceremony.

The way that had been indicated to me led me up from my headquarters in Lyndhurst through the sylvan road until it comes out, just opposite the path to the historic Rufus Stone, on that highway leading from Winchester to Ringwood, along the watershed known as Vinney Ridge. Here, at some comparative altitude, one is away from the woodland scenes, on a moorland purple with heather and bright with the bloom of gorse, and on either side of the road is a splendid vista over the trees, successive distances receding farther and farther from the eye, till southward one can see the blue outline of the Isle of Wight. Here and there the road dips with sharp depression into a

little valley carved by one of the southward-running streams, and in one of these depressions I saw, beneath the birch trees that fringe and mark the course of the rivulets, an establishment familiar to my recollection, of two caravans and a tent, the blue smoke eddying up among the graceful foliage of the birches, and shrouding the scene in a mysterious and beautiful haze.

The vans, beside which the horses were grazing, were remote by some thirty or forty yards from the road, sufficiently far to receive only an attenuated sprinkling of the dust raised by the passing vehicles, yet near enough to see all the life and movement of the road. The stream ran down with a gurgle beneath the road bridge and on past the encampment, for the most part hidden by the masses of the bracken that grows so tall and luxuriant in that genial climate. Had I been sufficiently acquainted with George Hood's peculiar whistle I think I should have used it to announce my presence, as I leaned my bicycle against the low parapet of the

bridge, and made my way through the bracken towards the vans. I did not however, even so, arrive without due notice given, for I was still at a distance of twenty paces or so from the nearest of the vans, when the well-remembered cry of the big cockatoo came to my ears from some hidden depths of the forest, and simultaneously, as if the cry was understood as a signal of alarm, Gracia came to the door of the van and stood shading her eyes from the sun as I came towards her. With the sunlight thus full upon her, I could see her features more plainly than she could discern mine, and not until I was within a yard or two did her face show recognition. Then she exclaimed quickly: "Oh, it is you! I am so glad to see you —and George?"

There was an eagerness of interrogation as she asked the question, the slightest possible flush, and a look of expectation on her features that were so seldom quickened from their perfectly beautiful repose, that came to me like a revelation, and made my heart ache that I was obliged to an-

swer: "No. I am alone. George is not here."

I felt grateful to my lucky lack of ability to imitate the whistle of her husband, which alone had prevented my using it as I approached. As it was, her disappointment was sufficiently keen—for the moment only. The next instant the anxious flush had passed, and the face had resumed its normal expression of perfect content, perfect health, perfect beauty. But I had found out what I wanted to know. That slight access of excitement, so slight that only in a woman so reposeful as my friend's most beautiful wife would it have been significant at all, had said its say. It had told me that the man she expected to accompany me was the man—I will not say the man she loved, because that is such a vague word, with so many meanings, and because love is such a different thing at the heart of one woman and of another. I will rather say the man that mattered, the man for whom her pulses went quicker, the man on whom her thoughts dwelt. That is a better way of putting it than

to say, simply and complexly, "loved"—which might be taken to mean anything, everything, or nearly nothing. George Hood was the man who obsessed her heart and mind. I saw that, and the perception gave me a pang as I thought of my latest talks with this man. My latest talk of all had been in the train coming up from his father's house. We had not met since.

After the first eager question, whether George was with me, she did not mention him again, except incidentally. She still had her wonderful gift of asking no questions, of appearing entirely free of natural curiosity. It seemed to me, as I gazed upon her marvellously perfect face, that while it had certainly lost nothing of its perfection there was a trifle less fulness in the oval contour, a shade less brilliancy in the still extraordinarily brilliant coloring. We talked chiefly of her doings, and of the daily small adventures and incidents of their leisurely journey from the forest of Ashdown to the New Forest. The life struck me again, as it had struck me before, with a sense of the marvellous absence

of any respect or care for time. There was none of that conception of a task to be accomplished, which harasses, even while it dignifies, the daily life of most civilized men; there was no impatience. These people seemed to have entered already on an eternity, of which really, so far as we are able to grasp the idea, the essence must be just this very absence of the sense of time, absence of all sense that the night cometh when no man may work. Yet the only attempt at explanation of eternity that we can give, to ourselves or to others, is, as George Hood had observed to me, to say that it is immensely long time.

So far I had been fortunate in finding Gracia by herself; but now from the gloom of the forest came an enchanting procession, heralded, as the coming of Pan should be, with melody. First came Tio, in his picturesque dress, with the fiddle, bowing as he walked; then, following, the brown-legged, bare-legged boy, waddling slowly, in its first beginnings of a walk; finally, waddling likewise and

intensely comic, but as grave as either of the other two, the white cockatoo nodding its head and alternately raising and dropping its crest to the pulsing time of the music.

This was the noble procession that should have continued its course right up to the steps of the van; but on sight of me Tio stopped, and the boy stopped, and the cockatoo stopped, all with a single assent, as if I had been the head of Medusa to turn them all to stone. When they saw who I was, the order of march, slightly changed, was resumed. Tio continued his walk, but ceased his playing. The boy crammed a fat hand into his mouth, to stop shyness, and came forward hidden by Tio. The cockatoo took up the part of band, given over by Tio, screaming "Ge-orge, Ge-orge, Ge-orge," at the top of its voice, apparently associating me with its master. In this there was reason, for it was in its master's company that it had seen me; but it embarrassed the situation, for the remark was too like that of Gracia at first sight of me.

Behind the procession itself, hardly as if belonging to it, but rather as if only unofficially attached, another man had followed, as they came from under the trees. He, like the others, had stopped on seeing me, but unlike the others, had not resumed his march when they recognized me. He had gone off by himself back into the forest.

Tio seemed pleased to meet me again, and the boy threw off his reserve and took his fist from his mouth as if he knew me for a friend. Only the cockatoo remained implacable, now and again crooning "Ge-orge" to itself in soliloquy, but showing up its crest in anger when I approached it to attempt a caress, as if to indicate that I was to blame in not supplying its evident desire for "George." I felt that I was so, too.

Tio and I talked long, over tobacco, of the moving incidents by flood and field that had happened to them since I had last seen them, in course of their slow travel from that forest of Ashdown to this forest called New. He asked me with

a certain significance "where was Mr. Hood?" and when I had answered as fully as I could all the many questions implied in the one, he asked no further and I had a feeling that he was aggrieved, for Gracia's sake, no doubt, rather than his own; but that he was too proud—again for her, rather than himself—to make complaint.

So, when the bats began to flit, I left them. The cockatoo had his head beneath his feathers; the boy had been put to sleep. Gracia waved me a good-bye from the van steps, and Tio came with me to help light the lantern of my bicycle.

In course of this proceeding my mind reverted suddenly to the man whom I had seen in the rear of the procession coming from the forest. He had stopped when the rest of the procession halted, arrested by my arrival, but had not come forward with the others when their march was resumed. It had seemed as if he had almost intentionally turned back, that I should not observe him. I asked Tio who the man was.

"Oh," he said indifferently, "that was Jim Lee."

"Jim Lee?" I replied, searching my memory.

"He 's the one that came to us in Ashdown Forest the time you were down there," Tio explained. "The one that had lost all his money buying a colt at Groombridge."

"I remember now," I said, the details coming back to me. It was no wonder that I did not recognize the man, for I had not seen his face before, had only heard his voice, which had awakened me in the early morning, bewailing his loss.

"Did he ever get his money back?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Tio. "You see it was like this—Jim had agreed to give fifty pound for the colts, and the colts were worth that, for he had made the bargain before he got boozed; but when it came to the paying, Jim knew he was boozed then, so he just gave all the notes he had to the farmer he was buying the colts off, and told him to pay himself. The farmer

did that all right; but, seeing the state Jim was in, he thought the best thing he could do was to take care of the notes for him till he came to again; so he put the lot in his pocket. Jim was in a rare way, as you may remember, when he came to, but he went straight away back then to the farmer to see if he could tell him anything about the notes. Of course the farmer knew he was sure to do that. The farmer put him off for a bit, just to tease him and to make him more careful next time, and then handed him all the notes over, barring the fifty for the colts."

"Is Jim Lee living with you—I mean, is he staying with you?" I asked.

Tio answered with a little hesitation. "In a way he 's staying with us," he said. "That is, he 's in his own van, of course, but it 's not far off."

"He travelled down with you from Ashdown Forest?" I suggested.

Tio looked at me suspiciously. He showed still more hesitation before he answered this, but when he did answer he answered very fully. He answered

not only the question, but all that the question seemed to him to imply, and more than I ever had intended it to imply. "Yes," he said, speaking with a slow deliberation that he intended to be impressive, and that did not fail to impress me. "He travelled with us from Ashdown Forest. Oh, yes," he went on, "I know what it is you mean to ask—perhaps what Mr. Hood sent you down to ask."

I interpolated that Mr. Hood had no knowledge of my visit, but he continued without paying any heed to me: "Jim Lee is here often, and he is not here without an object. He knows, as well as you know and as well as I know—as well as every one except that poor girl knows —that the marriage Mr. Hood went through with her is no marriage at all, here in England. He knows that," Tio went on, with wrath gathering in his eyes and in his voice, "and the best thing you can do is to go back and tell Mr. Hood that if he don't value his own property there's other people that does. You 'd better tell him that—perhaps that 'll teach

him." Tio wagged his head in sorrowful anger.

"But she does n't care for him, Tio," I said, with confidence; "for Jim Lee, I mean."

"She!" said Tio with a tinge of scorn in his voice, but I could hardly tell whether it were meant for her or for the very notion of her caring for such as Jim Lee. "She is bound up heart and soul with Mr. Hood. He—that is, Jim Lee—has offered her all that a queen could want. He has four houses all his own in Crewkerne, and a bit of freehold down outside of Bournemouth"—Tio jerked his thumb southward to indicate the direction of this estate as he spoke—"and two vans, and I should think upwards of thirty horses; but she—she is bound up heart and soul, as I say, with Mr. Hood."

I had known it before he told me. I had seen in her eyes, as we spoke of George Hood together, that he was the man for her that mattered, and that all the rest were nothing; so it was no more than my own previous conviction that Tio

confirmed. But the fact of Jim Lee in the background knocking at the door of her heart with the gifts that would make a queen's dowry, of four houses—cottages, they were better to be described, no doubt—in Crewkerne, the freehold—winter standing-room for a van—outside Bournemouth, the vans and the horses—all this lent the dramatic interest that alone was needed to complete the situation; and ruminating thereon very sorrowfully I followed the gleam of my lamp along the way that led back to civilization.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND MOOD AT ITS ZENITH

I CAME back to London with my mind made up to see George Hood and hint to him, with all the delicacy that the case required, my conviction that Gracia was suffering by his neglect. Hood was himself one of those whom he described, with his turn for whimsical paradox, as "understanding what you meant even *after* you had said it." His *flair* for the meaning that we try blunderingly to express in words was wonderful. I had spoken not ten words to introduce my subject before he knew all that I had to say to him—and a good deal more of what I thought, but should not be able to say. He changed the subject then with an abruptness that was equivalent to closing it, and at once asked me to dine with him

and a small party at the Carlton and come on for bridge in his studio afterwards.

It is no use trying to describe that dinner party. I could describe that Carlton Restaurant—most people know that already—or a Carlton *menu*—that again is hardly a novelty—but what I am unable to describe, or give idea of, are the humor, the wit, and real brilliancy of George Hood's conversation that evening. What we in England understand by conversation is very different from the notion conveyed by the same word in America, where, by-the-bye, they would say that conversation is dead in England—a lost art. With us it is a quick exchange of thought suggested by thought. It is not dead; where it exists it is very much alive indeed, but it exists in few places, principally at some rather Bohemian clubs and at certain dinner tables in London, and also (which may not be believed easily) in some provincial towns. The ancient analogy of the flint and the steel comes in not amiss to give the hint of the meaning of good conversation according to our view. According

to the American view, conversation has more of the character of monologue, of oratory, and even includes anecdote. America says of our conversation that it is not talk, but barking. We are sometimes apt to find the American disposition to oratory a bore. The facts are the more curious because respective national characteristics might have led us to expect the case reversed. Nevertheless it was an American, an American lady, Miss Whatman, who was the steel to the flint of George Hood's wit at his dinner party and after.

According to programme, the after-dinner time was to be given up to bridge, and it is seldom that its claims are neglected; but when we were gathered in George Hood's wonderful studio and the duel of wit (for mainly it resolved itself into duologue) between these two, commenced at the dinner table, was resumed, the rest of the party seemed very content to leave the cards alone and take the rôle of audience.

"Are they always like this?" I asked

one of the guests, who, as I knew, must often have met Hood and Miss Whatman at the same dinner table.

"They are always good," he answered. "I always have said that meeting them together was the best play in London. But I have never known George as quick as he is to-night. He is putting out the very best of himself."

I had hardly expected any other answer. It was inconceivable that it could always be thus. It was certain, too, that on my friend's part, whom I knew to be by disposition the most lazily dreamy of men, the intellectual effort must be great; but with the words of the reply, "he is putting out the very best of himself," illumination came to me, or so I fancied, in a flash. I seemed to understand all at once the reason and motive of this unusual effort. The coruscation of wit, as it is called, was a spectacle arranged mainly for my own benefit. When I had thrown out the advanced guard of my intended hints to Hood on the subject of Gracia, he had almost immediately invited me to make one

of this present party; and now I seemed able to perceive the connection between the one and the other, my own hints and the invitation, which had escaped me before. He desired, or so I thought that I perceived, that I should see his intellect at its brightest, as it was capable of shining in presence of the sympathetic brilliance of this American, in order that I might realize the full force of the attraction that was taking him from Gracia of the perfect but soulless body, so that I might perhaps give him justification for yielding to an attraction which developed in him mental capacities of such splendor. And with that thought inevitably came a comparative rating of these two women, each in her way so exceptional, so astonishingly different.

The American was an attractive woman. She had the aristocratic carriage that appears to belong of a common right to the cultured women of the great republic. To classical correctness neither her features nor figure had even a remote claim. The forehead was high and narrow; the eyes

were not large, but arresting of the attention with their vivacity of expression of every thought and feeling; the nose was straight, too thinly cut for beauty; the mouth was small, but too firmly closed in repose to allow its lines to be soft and alluring; the chin was remarkable, long and pointed, following a flat angle of the jaw that gave some suggestion of a snake-like fineness; the neck was slender, well placed on the small, square shoulders; the figure finely slender, and the feet and hands curiously small for the height, which was above the medium. The ripe-corn-colored hair was gathered in clusters high on the head. She was simply, but even as I, a man, could not fail to see, perfectly dressed, and wore only enough jewelry to avoid the affectation of wearing none.

Absently, as I noticed the contrast between the woman who now held George Hood by the charm of her mind and that other who had held him once by the charm of her body, I took from the table a manuscript book in which, as it seemed, Hood jotted down any quotation that pleased or

struck him, and the first in the whole book was this, from Charles Kingsley:

> Do the work that 's nearest,
> Though it 's dull at whiles,
> Helping when you meet them,
> Lame dogs over stiles.

I smiled. The simple and wholesome view of life and duty was so remote from the practice of my friend who had made this quotation with approval. The next was a line from Balzac: "Le temps le mieux employé est celui qu'on perd." That was better in accord with his practice. Then came:

> Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
> Weep, and you weep alone;
> For the sad old Earth must borrow her mirth,
> She has sorrow enough of her own—

and so on. This was excellent counsel, but it was not made for my friend's assimilation, who was in the first place quite incapable of commanding his moods, and in the second quite indifferent to what the "sad old Earth" did. He could plough

his own furrow, happily or unhappily as it might be; but the approval and companionship of his fellow men did not enter at all into the profit-and-loss account of his happiness.

The party began breaking up. Good-byes are boring, and I kept in the background. Miss Whatman came across the studio to me, after throwing her cloak about her shoulders. "Good-bye," she said. And I, too, said "Good-bye." Then she added, "I wonder why it is you don't like me? I want you to like me. You are George Hood's friend."

To this kind of remark it is hard to find an answer all in an instant; and truthfully I was not sure whether or no I liked her. It was true at least that I had an antagonistic sentiment towards her on account of Gracia. But how did she know this? I had not been aware that she had regarded me with more than the most passing attention all the evening; and yet here she surprised me by revealing to me my own feeling with a knowledge of it greater than my own!

She was gone before I had said any definite word that had meaning, and a minute later Hood and I were alone. He looked at me, saying nothing, but with eyes that asked a question. I nodded, answering the question. "Is she not wonderful?" he asked, as if to test that he had been right in thinking that I understood the question in his eyes; and again I nodded.

"Women doubtless," said he, "speaking generally, God made for different purposes, to fulfil different needs of the man for whom woman is the helpmeet. Some are made for sympathy, some for the one use, some for the other; and some, there is not the slightest doubt, God must have made when He was in a very evil mood and did not want His creation to be too happy. That is the only explanation of a good many of them."

"Try another explanation," I suggested, "that it is not God at first hand, but only His servant, man, that made those women such as they are."

"That savors a bit of the pulpit," he replied, with a just rebuke; "but even

taking that as you say it, man was God's servant in the matter, and for that which a man does through his agent the law of man holds him as responsible as for that which he does himself. I do not know why you should judge your God by a more indulgent standard."

He took up a book and began to read, saying, "Do you know the Song of Khan Lada?" I shook my head this time, and he read:

Only in August my heart was aflame.
Catching the scent of your wind-stirred hair,
Now, though you spread it to soften my sleep
Through the night I should hardly care.
Only last August I drank that water
Because it had chanced to cool your hands;
When love is over, how little of love
Even the lover understands![1]

He stopped reading and did not speak for a little while. Then he said, "It is curious, but, do you know, I do not think that Gracia ever once told me that she loved me—not directly, in words."

"But she has proved it," I said.

[1] Lawrence Hope: *The Garden of Kama.*

"Yes," he agreed, "she has." He had been turning over the leaves of the book and now began to read again:

Whether I love you? You do not ask,
Nor waste yourself on the thankless task.
I give your kisses at least return,
What matter whether they freeze or burn?
I feel the strength of your fervent arms,
What matter whether it heals or harms?

You are wise: you take what the gods have sent,
You ask no question, but rest content,
So I am with you to take your kiss,
And perhaps I value you more for this,
For this is Wisdom: to love, to live,
To take what Fate or the gods may give,
To ask no question, to make no prayer,
To kiss the lips and caress the hair,
Speed passion's ebb as you greet its flow,—
To have,—to hold,—and,—in time,—let go!

Of course, while he read, I had to do the work of interpretation, to translate the words out of the impersonal sense in which they were meant by the writer into the personal sense of the relations of the reader with Gracia, in which I quite understood that he intended me to take them.

At the end of the reading, and after a little pause, he said, "No. She asks no questions. She did not ask you any about me, about my life?"

"No," I replied, "none."

"No," he said. "She would not. It is not her way. In that she is wonderful. Well, I will ask one question of you about her: do you think there is any one, any of her own people, to whom she gives a thought when I am away from her?"

"No," I answered, with an indignation that I did not trouble to conceal from him. "I am certain there is not."

"You are quite right," he said, rather wearily—"right to be angry with me for asking such a question. I am ashamed of it myself. It would make things easier perhaps if she did." Then, after a quick pace or two up and down the room, he added, "Do you know I believe she would have a stronger hold on me if she did?"

"Quite likely, I should think, I said. "Such is the nature of man."

Evidently we were growing sententious —and sleepy. I got up to go. "And if

she thinks of none of them," I said, "you may be sure it is not from want of opportunity, temptation, asking—however you like to put it. Tio told me when I was down in the forest, that Jim Lee is always after her, to get her to marry him. He apparently attaches no great importance to the form of bond you contracted with her."

"I am afraid the morals of the average gypsy are not as exemplary as some people who have written about them would make believe," he said. "Probably Jim Lee does not attach a great deal of importance to any form of the marriage bond, whether a priest or a blacksmith tied it.

"I shall be away from town for a day or two" he said as I bade him good night. "I had a letter this morning from the old butler saying that my father has not been so well. He does not seem to think it anything serious, but I shall go down tomorrow to see how he is."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HAND OF DEATH

WITHIN a week I was in Scotland, and on the morning after my arrival saw in the London papers notice of the death of George Hood's father. "From heart failure," the brief account said. I wrote at once to my friend such words of sympathy as my genuine grief for him prompted. Apparently the death had been sudden, for it had occurred the very day after the dinner party mentioned in the last chapter. In a sense it had also been unexpected, for Hood himself had expressly said that though he was going to Suffolk in reply to a letter from the servant telling him that his father was not so well, still he had no apprehension of the illness being immediately critical. At the same time I knew also that Hood was

aware that such a catastrophe was probable at any moment, and therefore could hardly come as a surprise although, when the long expected did happen, it could not fail to give something of a shock.

I received no answer—I had expected none—to my letter of condolence, and it was not until my return to London, many weeks later, that I again heard anything or saw anything of my friend.

He spoke very feelingly about his father's death, saying how hard it seemed that he should be taken now, just when father and son had learnt to understand and appreciate each other. He told me how much he regretted the years of misunderstanding—years, as he felt, lost forever, in which he might have received and have given so much happiness, but for their misunderstanding — years in which he might have known something of a home life more conventional than either the life of the van or the life of the Kensington studio. Then he began to tell me the manner of his father's death.

Hood had a look, which struck me im-

mediately that I saw him, of nervous strain, as if he had passed through some hard experience since our last meeting; and when I heard of the last scene of his father's life I was not surprised that it had left traces. It appeared that on arrival at his Suffolk home he had been told that his father was much as when the message that had summoned him was sent; he had gone up to the room, which was dignified with the name of study, where his father commonly sat: there he had found his father seated before a table covered with papers, with a waste-paper basket at his elbow. Already the basket was half full, or more, with the papers torn up and destroyed, and the process of destruction was in further course when it was arrested by George Hood's entrance into the room. It was arrested at once, and it was arrested forever, for, as he entered, his father raised his white face, for an instant his lips formed themselves to the expression of a smile, signifying a pleased recognition of his son whom he was expecting; then, whether even this light emotion and

its gentle access of pulse-beat were too severe a strain on the enfeebled heart, or whether the appearance of his son unannounced, although expected, occasioned a shock of surprise, slight yet too heavy for its over-worn recipient, his face changed its look of pleasure to one of frightful anguish; and a change, as rapid, of color, from white to livid, again giving place to a more pallid hue than ever, passed, even in the brief interval between George Hood's opening of the door and reaching his father's side. It was Hood's firm belief that his father was dead before he came to him. For all human uses, at least, his state was equivalent to death, for he never spoke, moved, or showed a sign of consciousness again.

"There fell from his hand," said George Hood, "even as I came to him, a paper. The coincidence is striking. What, do you think, that paper was? It was the will made by him when he was on bad terms with me, the will that dispossessed me of all my natural rights, the will he had made under the false impression

that I was married to Gracia. He died almost in the act of tearing it." George Hood looked at me curiously.

"It was in his hand. He had already torn it," I said, allowing just so much of the interrogative tone to come into the words as would suggest the expectation of an answer.

He did not give me any answer. He sat looking at me in the same curious way as before.

CHAPTER XIV

GEORGE HOOD'S SECOND MARRIAGE

EVENTS move fast when life is monotonous. Mine was monotonous enough to permit surprise at the pace with which changes broke the current of George Hood's life. Sooner than I should have supposed that the law's proverbial delays would allow it I saw proof of his father's will, a will of date prior to that of George's gypsy wedding. It argued therefore the destruction of a later will—of the will made while the testator was on ill terms with the son—of the will which the son told me he had seen in the hand of the testator when dying—of the will concerning which I had asked: "He had already torn it?" but had received in answer only my friend's curious, enigmatic look. The will, as stated in the *Illustrated London News* to have been proved, left virtually

everything, and it was a great sum, to my friend. That was the first of the changes in his life. He had become a rich man from a poor one. It is a change that generally means a good deal. It was a change that had, as I knew, a peculiar significance in George Hood's life for the moment, for it meant that he was now placed in a financial position which enabled him to marry whom he would without incurring the charge of fortune-hunting which kind critics would not have hesitated to bring if he had proposed to Miss Whatman with the very moderate prospects that he enjoyed while under his father's displeasure.

The advent of the second of the changes in the life of my friend was announced to me in the form of a request that I should be his best man at his marriage with Miss Olga Whatman. Following my acceptance of this office I was formally introduced by Hood to his *fiancée* as his closest friend, and found myself at once regarded with the interest that was natural. It was an interest with which I could not flatter myself that the lady had ever favored me

before, and I understood its significance immediately. It meant, "To what degree is he malleable? How much information shall I extract from him?"

I do not wish to draw an unamiable portrait. It was so natural as to be inevitable that this should be the lady's point of view. In return for the little, and the generalities, that I gave her she told me much of her views for George Hood in the future. She wished him to go into Parliament, to gain office and a seat in the Cabinet. Her ambition was of the better kind—it was ambition frankly, there was no pretence of duty or serving his country. She was under no delusion of the kind that makes some women think that one man, the one man in whom they take interest, is the one man that the country wants. She was too clear-sighted into her own motives, and gifted with too just a sense of proportion, to lose herself thus. But the ambition was of the better kind. It had no *arrière pensée* of social advantage. She had quite sufficiently "arrived" already to be independent of that. A

Cabinet Minister's wife is not necessarily any figure in society; but Miss Whatman, before being anybody's wife, distinctly was. So the ambition was not of the vulgar kind. But she recognized and appreciated her husband's gifts of intellect, which were unusual, and she wished to see him go down with them into the common arena of politics and do battle for her—after all it is very like the mediæval lists, with wits instead of lances—confounding his foes and emerging triumphant.

"George has the talent, has he not," she said, after sketching the career she desired for him.

"Certainly he has the intellect," I said, "to become anything."

"What's the distinction you mean to draw?"

"I mean that he has the mental gifts to rise to any position you like; my doubt is whether he has the wish and the will to make him exert his gifts."

She nodded at that, with a glad confidence in her eyes. I knew her thought to be, "I will be the will and the wish for

him"; but though she was really in love, she was not so fatuous as to say it.

"Would n't it be splendid," she exclaimed, "to be Prime Minister of an ancient country like England, to feel that you were making history? It would be glorious."

"I don't think the glory of it would appeal to George," I said.

Her wise reticence was not proof against this. "I will make him," she said, with a note of assured triumph. "Why should a man let his talents rust in the earth?"

Already, whether by virtue of Miss Olga's influence, or by the workings of other causes, I found a change in my friend. He seemed to have lost something—the quality that was one of his greatest attractions for me—his power of indolence, his gift of repose. In his common-place book I had seen quoted, of course with tacit approval, the passage of Balzac, "Le temps le mieux employé est celui qu'on perd"; and he had lived as if that maxim had hold of his heart. As a boy, he had told me, he had astonished a master who had asked

him what he was going to do during a spare hour between lessons. "I 'm going to do nothing," he had said. Pressed as to what "nothing," meant, it was found that it really did mean nothing—no game, no book, no talk, no walk, not even sleep, simply the wakeful enjoyment of doing nothing. It was Oriental. He had developed this disposition, which is not natural in a boy, as he grew up, until the habit of doing nothing and the faculty of enjoying it—a very valuable and rare one—had become quite characteristic of him. But since his engagement, as I fancied, he had lost a good deal of it. It seemed almost as if he had closed down the page, for the purpose of using the maxim as a working one in life, that bore these words of Balzac, and had taken to heart instead those words of Kingsley's which I had found quite in friendly neighborhood with those of Balzac in his book:

> Do the work that 's nearest,
> Though it 's dull at whiles,
> Helping, when you meet them,
> Lame dogs over stiles.

I do not know that lame dogs to be helped came in his way much, although he affected charitable work in general; but he seemed constantly to have near at hand a work to be done, and to go from one work to another in feverish haste, as if he had acquired a new and strange passion for creating duties for himself. The change could not fail to set a mark on his face, which had begun to wear a look of nervous strain that was new to it.

The wedding was as quiet as possible, owing to the recent death of Hood's father. Nevertheless, the papers found it needful to write a good deal that was superfluous about the marriage of one who had been so well known in London society (or in a certain section of it) as Miss Whatman.

Four days after the wedding, when I came from the club to my rooms in St. James's Place about midnight, I was followed. A man overtook me as I reached my lodgings. He gave no word of greeting, but thrust into my hand a torn and dirty fragment of newspaper, saying in a foreign voice that was familiar to me, "Is

that true?" There was a ring of something very like menace in the tone, and for a moment I was glad that my back was to the wall, and the main street close at hand. Then I recognized him.

"Tio!" I said surprised, "is it you?"

But by way of all answer he repeated his former question, with a fierce nod towards the bit of newspaper that I held in my hand:

"Is that true?"

I read the heading of the paragraph by the fanlight above the door and recognized it as one of the accounts of Hood's wedding that had gone the round of the papers.

"Yes," I said. "Yes, it is true." There was nothing else to be said, however greatly I might regret the necessity of saying it. It was my intention to question the old man about Gracia, to discover in what light he and she viewed this marriage, on formal lines, of my friend; but he gave me no chance. He waited only for my answer, "Yes, it is true," and was gone.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN FROM THE HONEYMOON

I WAS disturbed, more than a little, by the menace that seemed implied by the question asked by Tio as he thrust the dirty scrap of newspaper into my hand. Had I known how to do so, I should have communicated the hint of danger to my friend, but I did not know his address. His lawyers offered to forward a letter for me, but I did not care to send a message of this kind by any devious and doubtful channel. I determined to wait till he returned from the Continent. So long as he was abroad I did not suppose that he was in immediate risk. I wrote to him through his solicitors, saying only that I should be pleased to hear from him directly he came home; and in response to that letter had a wire from him at Milan saying that he was

on his way back with his wife and asking me to dine with them in London on that day week.

Just before his marriage Hood had bought one of the old-fashioned houses in Berkeley Square, and it was here that I went to dine with him and his bride.

"You are our first guest—the first to break the bread of hospitality in our house," Mrs. Hood said. She entertained me, and George scarcely less, during dinner with a charmingly vivacious and humorous account of their winter honeymoon in Sicily. With Taormina for their headquarters they had made expeditions, both by land and in a yacht, and the days appeared to have gone in ideal idling fashion.

Hood and his wife seemed as mutually happy as two people can be. The look of nerve-strain on his face that I had noticed was gone, with that sense of restlessness which had accompanied it. He was again as I had known him, the lazy, brilliant idler, complected of the idealist and humorist, looking at life through dreamy

half-closed lids and strangely and beautifully tinted glasses. I dreaded the communication that I had to make to him after dinner, about the menace that I had fancied in Tio's tone. After all it might be the purest fancy. In the interval of nearly a fortnight that had elapsed since the night when he had accosted me in St. James's Place, the impression that the gypsy's manner had made upon me had grown less vivid. It might have meant nothing after all. I felt a great reluctance to trouble my friend's newly regained peace by reference to a subject that was, to say the least, out of harmony with the present circumstances. Nevertheless, I had to explain in some way the meaning of the letter I had written him requesting a meeting. The true way was the most simple, and in a word or two I told him what had occurred and the impression it had made on me.

By way of answer he took my hand in his own, drew it behind his back and just below the shoulder blade, and then pressing it on his body, said, "Do you feel that?"

But for the obsession with which my own mind was full, but for the picture I had often conjured of Tio with his Spanish knife, stealing up behind my friend to plunge the blade into his heart, I might not have known the significance of the hard yet yielding substance on which my fingers pressed; but with the light of that fancied picture to interpret for me I had no difficulty.

"Mail?" I said.

He nodded. "Just a very small plate —like a porous plaster," he said, laughing.

"Yes," I said gravely. "It is too small. If there is necessity for wearing it at all it ought to be larger. And it is too low down."

"It is not," he said with a quiet confidence. "It would be if old Tio was a bungler, or if he had been brought up in a different school of the *cuchillo.* The Spanish gypsy does not strike downwards nor upwards. He prods, as if with a rapier. I have heard it all argued scientifically. It is the safest and surest way."

I saw that he had taken his measures with a forethought that left no room for my suggestions.

"Your wife knows?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Luck has been with me so far. She has never happened to feel it. When she does I must give some explanation, I suppose. She will think me a coward, or absurdly apprehensive of attack. It does not matter."

"Had you any reason, before I spoke to you, for being afraid of Tio?"

"Only such reason as my knowledge of his character and the character of the people he belongs to gives."

"Is Tio the one you were afraid of?"

"I think so—yes. Whom else?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Gracia?" I said, with a question in the tone.

"I think not," he said doubtfully. "I could not say."

Then he began to ask me about Gracia and about the boy, whether I had seen them lately, and so on. He told me in what county they were—far away in the west, in Devon—that at least was the direction in

which they had been said to be going, when they came out of their stationary winter quarters near Bournemouth, by Hood's lawyer, who supplied Gracia with money. He asked me if I would go down and see them and report to him how they were all faring ; and this I promised to do within a week or so.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SOOTHING OF THE SEA

It was at Dulverton that I came first on the track of the party I was looking for. Now and again in the quest I had paused to ask myself my motives. It was not affection for George Hood that drove me on these wanderings in search of these wanderers. I had doubts of the nature of my sentiment for him. Friendship it included, without doubt, but affection I could hardly claim for it. I doubted much if I had a real liking for the man to whom I refer so often in these pages as my friend. There was much in him that was attractive; there was something also that repelled. But above all, he was interesting. His life and the problems that it revealed to me were unusually interesting. That was the real key that I seemed to

find for the motives that sent me touring over combe and moorland roads on a bicycle that jolted sorely in the ruts and water-worn places. Shrewdly I asked myself if I had dealt fairly in this self-searching. I suspected myself sorely; again and again asking myself if it were really on account of this, my doubtful friend, that I went these odysseys, and in no measure on account of that beautiful woman, beyond all others that I had ever seen for beauty, who was reputed to be his wife. But, though I suspected, I could not convict myself. With the best will in the world to find myself guilty I had perforce to pass a verdict of heart freedom. The woman of the caravan, Gracia, was a charm to the eyes, but I found that she had said nothing to my heart.

It was at Dulverton that I first heard of the party, from one of the moor gypsies, and was told that they had been there—Tio, Gracia, and the boy—but had gone westward again across Exmoor to the Barnstaple country. So that way, too, towards the setting sun, I had to turn my

wheels, through the early spring weather which comes softly and kindly in the genial combes, but leaves the higher ground bare and swept by east winds for weeks longer. At length I came down off the moorland, and as I left it heard fresh tidings of those I sought. They were gone westward still to the Braunton Burrows, on the edge of Bideford Bay and the estuary into which run together the rivers Taw and Torridge. So then I pedalled on to the old town of Barnstaple, across its bridge that spans the river Taw, and in a mile or two came to a by-road which led out to a sandy waste where the track that would bear my cycle was lost in soft powdery sand, and I had to take to my feet, pushing the reluctant bicycle. There was a track to follow, and the track had been cut within a few days—certainly since the last high gale, that would have obliterated all traces on the sand—by the wheels of a heavy wagon. Moreover, beside the track, where a spring had moistened the sand and made it plastic, I found, twice, the impress of human feet, bare of shoes or

stockings, some small, some larger; and these silent witnesses told me that the caravan had gone forward, with Gracia and her boy sometimes walking barefoot by the side, and I guessed that this track would soon bring my search to an end, for it certainly led out to the beach, and it was unlikely that there would be any other road connecting with it that would lead to the beach by another way. The track went gleaming and blinding white over the white sand that threw back the rays of the mid-day spring sun like a solid heat. It was breathless in the shelter of the sand-dunes that only the thin yellow marram clothed. Here and there turf had won over the sand and there was a close, many-colored carpet of thyme and other tiny and low-growing flowers with the bees going over them in myriads, with a ceaseless hum, and small blue butterflies innumerable. Where water had lain, and the tall rushes grew, their stems were dotted with the cocoons of the gay burnet moth. Here and there were patches of euphorbia.

The sound of the sea grew louder and a fresher and more salt breath came to relieve the heat, and presently, on the landward side of a high dune facing the sea, I saw the travelling homes I was in search of. The watchful cockatoo gave notice of my coming first, with its screeching cry of "Ge-orge, Ge-orge," never failing, or so it seemed, to associate me with its master, in whose company it had first seen me. I cursed the bird from my heart at the thought that its call would suggest to Gracia, as it had done once before, that he whom she must regard as her husband by all law, human and divine, as known to her, was near at hand, only that she might be disappointed sadly. About the wagons, however, were only Tio and the youth, who dragged themselves out from the shade underneath the vans in which they had been lying, passing their time in that blissful occupation of doing nothing at which they were so proficient. Tio approached me with eyes blinking at the glare of the sun. I was a little doubtful about his reception of me, but it was not

hostile, though its coolness was almost refreshing in the heat of the day. It was no less obvious than it was natural that George Hood's friends were not reckoned by Tio of the value at which he once held them.

I asked after Gracia and the boy. Tio said they were down by the shore. "Bathing?" I asked. "Paddling?"

Tio shrugged his shoulders, as if to indicate that he could not say what they might be doing. Then he added, "She sits all her time now looking out to sea."

I did not want to hear more, and there was a choke in my voice that did not make talking easy, so full of pathetic meaning seemed Tio's simple words describing Gracia's favorite occupation. I went by the track he indicated to me, leading among the sand-hills to the shore, and there I found her, as he had led me to expect, looking out to sea. She sat in a cave of the sand-dunes, used, likely enough, in the winter by a 'longshore gunner, as he lay out at the dusk of dawn or twilight for the flighting duck. She sat with her knees

drawn up and her elbows upon them, and her chin buried in her hands, gazing seaward. The sand of the foreshore went shimmering away down in such a golden haze of sunlit splendor that one could scarcely make out, for the dancing mirage, where the sea met the land; but farther out there was a line of brightest snowy white, where the breakers raced eternally on the estuary bar. The white line broke sharply the azure surface of the sea that stretched north and west between the headlands of Morte and Hartland, with no interruption save the low outline of Lundy Island in the distance between. There was not a soul within view; nevertheless, Gracia sat there in the hollow of the sand, looking over the sea; but I could guess that her eyes of speculation were not filled by the scene before them, but had retrospections and regrets for their occupation. The soft sound of my footsteps on the shelly beach was lost in the song of the light breeze combing the marram grass that fringed the cave of sand in which she sat, so that she did not hear nor notice me till

I was close upon her. Then she raised her face from her hands and looked at me.

I was there as the emissary of him whom I called my friend, George Hood; yet, as the woman turned her face on me, I found a voice at my heart cursing him for the pain he had caused, for the beauty he had marred. By the light of the suffering written on that face, which before had been of almost too perfect beauty to be disturbed by any definite expression, the wisdom of those sophistries by which Hood had led even me, a person without prejudice in this regard, to admit that his path of duty might consist with wedding the American who seemed made to draw the brightest and the best from him, to elevate his intellectual nature to its highest possible degree—these sophistries seemed stricken to dumb and wicked foolishness by the pain I read on the face of the woman whom Hood used to call his wife. And as I cursed my so-called friend in my heart, I wished him the worst that I could conceive in wishing him one look at that face as I saw it then.

It was beautiful still, maybe it was more beautiful than it had ever been before, though I do not think that possible. The oval of the outline was less full and more delicate, but the mouth, in winning an expression of sadness, had lost the curves that had made its perfection. Above all, the change was in the eyes, that had a look of longing that one does not see in the eyes of a happy man or woman. They were as the eyes of a dog that had to make all its prayer with them, since the gift of speech has not been granted. I could not see the boy for the moment. Probably he was at play among the sand-hills.

When she saw me she greeted me as if we had met but the day before. It is a manner characteristic of these folk, to whom the unexpected is their constant portion because they have formed no plans and no anticipations of the future event. She put out a hand to me as I climbed up the slipping wall of sand, where for two steps forward I made one back, and courteously moved to give me

space to sit beside her. Then, when I was seated, I found myself tongue-tied. There was nothing to say before such silent sorrow as this woman suffered, and suffered without complaint—with acquiescence, as in the rain or the sunshine or the other gifts that are sent and are taken without question. I talked to her of all kinds of indifferent things—of the view, to which she was blind. She confessed to me that she had come hither with a desire to gaze on the sea. There is in the aspect of the sea something that always has solace for sentient things in pain. But she did not understand clearly that it gave her solace. Her desire to look upon the sea was instinctive and quite irrational, and she took in no details of its beauty. When I said that the sea was blue she assented, and when I drew her attention to the shimmering mirage over the sand she nodded amiably, but the scene had no hold of her æsthetic sense.

I asked after the boy; and the question was answered rather humorously by the appearance, at the moment, of the urchin

himself round a corner of a sand-hill a hundred yards or more away, in hot pursuit of a burrow-duck or sheldrake that had come from its home down a rabbit-hole in the sand-hill and proposed to walk sedately over the sand of the shore into the sea. But the proposed sedateness was a little disturbed by the boy's detection and pursuit of it. Nevertheless it still did not deign to take to its wings to escape from such a pigmy, but accelerated the pace of its ungainly waddle, so that the actions of the two, the boy and the bird, pursuer and pursued, had a ridiculous likeness to each other, as the chase went on, not rapidly, over the sand and into the shimmer where sea joined shore. A light of gladness came into the mother's eyes as she watched the comedy with a wide smile on her lovely face. It was not necessary to ask how the boy fared. His vigorous efforts, on his tiny legs, after the black and white bird spoke for themselves. Every twenty yards or so he fell prone on the sand, but quickly scrambled up again and resumed the hunt. At length the

bird gained the rippling wave, and immediately its waddling gait was changed for a most graceful carriage as it swam out swiftly over the dancing waves. For a while the boy watched it, then came running back over the shore again, stopping once in a while to pick a shell or other jetsam that attracted him. We watched him silently as he came; all this while Gracia had asked no question about George Hood. The very fact that she had not done so showed me that she knew all that had happened. It was not likely that Tio would have had the discretion, even if he had had the power, to keep from her the news conveyed by the scrap of paper that he had submitted to me in London. As I thought of his appearance under the gaslights it seemed almost incredible that this sunlit, sea-bright, sandy place could be part of the same world as that; yet not only was it part of the same world, but the two scenes so unlike were closely linked by some human destinies.

When the boy came up we all sat and chatted awhile about the incidents that

had befallen on their journey across the moor, and the shells and treasures that the boy had found on the beach. Gracia said that she was trying to teach him his letters, but that he preferred to run wild rather than to learn. As earnestly as I could, without impertinence, I urged her to give the boy education, and at that she did at last give some outward sign of her emotion, throwing her arms abroad with a despairing action and exclaiming, "What is the good? What is the good? His father has forgotten us."

I tried then—it was not a very excellent try, for my sense of right was outraged—to urge that this was not so; I said that he spoke often, anxiously and affectionately, about them both, which was true, and drew attention to the fact that he did not fail to send the regular supplies of money as a proof that he had not, as she supposed, forgotten them.

"Oh yes—as for that—the money!" she said scornfully; and indeed, when one knew her manner of life, one knew that here, for once, the scorn of money was not

an affectation; "but he does not care any longer, he never comes to see me, he never wants to see me."

She got up suddenly as she said this, gathered into her own hand the hand of the child who had been looking at her with surprised round eyes all the while that she was speaking, and so went down over the sand-hill, leaving me seated. I understood that she did not desire that I should follow her, and my thoughts, as I sat and gazed at the fair sea-scape, were hot against my friend who had done so great a wrong.

After a while I went back to the wagons, but Gracia and the boy were not there. I no longer met Tio as a friend—indeed I was not too sure whether he might not have tried, if the dusk had fallen, to make me proxy for George Hood and scapegoat for his sins, and find a sheath for his Spanish knife beneath my ribs. But he and the youth contented themselves with glances of cold animosity as I took my hot way back over the white sands.

CHAPTER XVII

WIFE AND HUSBAND

THE Hoods, as I have said, had bought one of the fine old houses in Berkeley Square, and I found Mrs. Hood very kindly disposed towards me, regarding me, as she observed laughingly, in the light of her husband's *âme damnée.* "I suppose," she said, "that as you have served him as best man, so one day you will be called on to play the part of *advocatus diaboli* at the Great Judgment."

"Not he," George Hood had replied readily. "He knows a good deal about me, but there are depths of my villainy that not even he has ever plumbed."

How much of his "villainy" had been revealed to his wife I did not know, but wondered, as my thoughts went back to the sad and beautiful face on the sand-

hills of Braunton Burrows. I had been virtually made free of the house in Berkeley Square, free to drop in casually to luncheon and to propose myself to dinner, and thus had every opportunity of studying George Hood's second *ménage* even as I had the first. It was impossible not to recognize Mrs. Hood's charm and grace. She had in very liberal measure those gifts of self-possession and alert intelligence that seem remarkable to us, but are almost common property with the cultured of her countrywomen. She had also her full share of the *exigeance* which is characteristic of them in the matrimonial relation, yet in spite of it I was quickly able to see that my friend had not surrendered his freedom at discretion. On most points where she was insistent he made the same graceful show of yielding, but yielded scarcely at all in the substance of any question that arose between them. Without doubt she was aware of her failure to influence him completely as she wished, and a little piqued by her failure. There was no evidence, for example, of George's acquies-

cence in her desire that he should seek a seat in Parliament. He never absolutely declined to consider the project, but effectually defeated it by making no effort whatever to realize it; and his Fabian tactics in this instance were only typical of his conduct in regard to other questions of their mutual difference.

I made a third at one of these discussions in the Berkeley Square house, and it happened, as Mrs. Hood assured me, that he had never expressed his views so freely to her when they were alone. Mrs. Hood, of course, was the eager, animated talker, full of schemes for her husband, while the husband himself lay in an attitude of something like Oriental indolence on a long-seated armchair, smoking cigarettes and listening to his wife's eloquence in a mood of humorous cynicism, both mood and attitude suggesting all that is most remote from ambition.

"Mr. Balfour as good as told me there was a safe constituency you could have," she declared emphatically. "He said he could not tell me the name now, for it was

not yet vacant, but he would let me know as soon as ever he was at liberty to."

"Mr. Balfour!" Hood commented. "You have made up your mind, then, to run me as a Conservative, Olga?"

Mrs. Hood disregarded the remark. "If only you would bestir yourself to do something!"

"That is what everybody 's doing—bestirring themselves—but it does not in the least follow that they 're doing anything; as a rule the contrary—the more bestirring, the less accomplishment."

Mrs. Hood shrugged her shoulders hopelessly. She had said her say. Hood took his cigarette from his mouth, settled himself more luxuriously than before in the depths of the long chair, and then, as if he deemed the guns of the enemy silenced for the moment, began to do a little talking on his own account. "You see," he said, "the weak point of politics as a profession is that after you have slaved and slaved, with heaven only knows what waste of breath and energy, to pass a certain measure, the opinion of the

world will be divided as equally as may be as to whether or no you have done more good than harm by it. If you were to take a poll of the English world, you would find opinions fairly divided as to whether it was better for the world that Gladstone has lived or it had been better that he never had been born—that is a proposition that any Conservative will grant you. If you are talking to a Radical, put Beaconsfield in place of Gladstone, and he will grant you the proposition just as readily as the other will grant you the other. Well, when that is how the account has to be made up at the last, it does not seem as if all the labors, even of the greatest politicians, could be of any very decisive value."

"Do you mean by that that when opinions are equally divided, truth lies midway?" Mrs. Hood asked quickly. "There was a time when opinions were fairly equally divided as to whether the sun went round the earth or the earth went round the sun."

"And what difference did it make to

human happiness when the question was decided?" Hood asked.

"It made just this difference, as it seems to me," she said, "that with the answer to the question the main doctrine of the Christian religion passed into the region of the unbelievable at once. When it was thought that the world was the centre and pivot of the universe it did not seem so incredible that the Creator should take so much interest in it as to send down His Son that the shedding of Divine blood might expiate human sin. When that notion of the earth as the centre and pivot was dispelled and the earth was found to be on the rim of a system of which the sun was the centre, with countless other systems around fully as important, then the whole idea became inconceivable. It was not to be thought that the Creator could send His Son into each of these countless planets to be crucified in each for the sake of His creatures' salvation. That would be a little *trop fort, mon ami.*"

"My dear Olga," Hood replied wearily, blowing a puff of smoke away as if other

things might be blown aside as easily, "you are a very clever woman, so clever that I almost doubt sometimes if your mind is quite feminine. As soon as you begin to argue I am reassured. The centre, if by that you mean the point of greatest interest—the focus of interest in the universe—does not depend on position. It is the point of highest development, wherever that may be. We have reason to think that in such of the universe as our eyes, at the small ends of telescopes, make visible to us, the point of highest development is with human beings, on earth. Therefore, even from that point of view there is no reason (except that it is altogether unreasonable, as human reason goes) that this miracle of miracles should not have been performed on the earth, just because the earth is at the circumference, instead of the centre, of our solar system. Its locality in the system is no argument. And, again, the plurality of worlds, which it pleases you for your argument to suppose inhabited, creates no added difficulty. The miracle is

difficult of credibility indeed, but if it can be believed that it happened once, there is no difficulty whatever in believing that it can be repeated. Besides, granting your big assumption of the plurality of worlds supporting something like what we call human life, it does not follow that in every human society there was a 'fall' requiring 'redemption.' Your most orthodox might concede you that."

"Of course, I know I am a woman, a poor woman," Mrs. Hood replied, with ironic humility, "and therefore logic is not to be expected of me; but is it the logical conclusion from what you have been saying that the best way for you to pass your life is to be an utter idler?"

Hood turned to me with a delighted smile. "What a disadvantage," he exclaimed, "mere man is at with woman through being bound by rules of logic! What man would dare the strategy of a flanking movement like that? No, Olga," he continued more seriously, "I am not contending that the ideal life for me or any one is one of utter idleness, but it is

possible to lead a life not altogether idle outside of politics and outside of any recognized profession. It is not necessary to call a man an idler because he is not earning a certain number of hundreds or thousands a year. After all, that is not the end of life."

"You speak as if you knew what the end of life was," she retorted.

"I wish I did," he replied. "Shall we say, by way of a suggestion, to get one inch nearer truth? At all events, I do not feel that I should fulfil my own end in life if I tried to get into Parliament in place of some other man who is much more eager to get there, and probably is much better fitted for it. It is not as if there was any lack, fortunately enough, of people to carry on the legislature and the government of the country. On the contrary, they are tumbling over each other to get into Parliament and to get office—why? is one of the eternal mysteries. I suppose man is so constituted that he likes to manage his fellow-creatures."

"Certainly woman is; but she does not seem always to get her way," Mrs. Hood said, with a whimsical humor.

"They are all so busy," he said with a weary sigh, "like a hive of bees, but they make so little honey. And 'God in heaven, what can it matter?' as some one says—Free Trade or Protection, a little richer or a little poorer?"

"But, George, you cannot deny that humanity has advanced. It would not have advanced but for the efforts made by humanity."

"Would it not?" he asked. "It seems to me humanity has a tendency to go along in the direction that demands least effort, in spite of the busy bees. I grant you the advance though, although it is a tremendous indictment of the scheme of human evolution that such things can be possible after all these centuries as occurred in Manchuria—or, to escape playing the rôle of the self-righteous Briton—shall we say in South Africa?"

"Nature has always been regardless of

the individual, so long as she can improve the type."

"Nature! yes," he agreed, almost with energy. "But you surely would not hold up Nature for our guidance—in this at least? It is Nature's greatest triumph to have evolved man; that is to say, a creature capable of sitting in judgment on Nature's methods and finding them cruel, barbarous. She has created something that has to be better than the laws by which she has created him. He has to fight with and on the side of Nature, evolution, God if you will, to render the type more perfect—and that means that he has to be a great deal better than Nature would have him be. This he can only do by obedience to the guide, the dæmon, with which Nature, or the God of Nature, has gifted every man in some degree."

"And your dæmon tells you," said Mrs. Hood with an irony rather Socratic, "that you ought not to go into Parliament?"

"It seems indicated to me that I should be wasting my time if I did."

"Your time! And that is a commodity so very precious!"

"You are getting frivolous, Olga. I like you ever so much better so than when you are merely logical."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BONDS OF MATRIMONY

THE hospitality affected by the Hoods took the shape of small dinner parties, at which conversation might be general, rather than of the banquets of a score of guests and upwards, which make virtually several small dinner parties of the one; and in these select circles there often was much of that striking of the flint and steel together in which the conversational powers of husband and wife were conspicuous. But when they dined alone, with myself as a third, as often happened, there was little of this display of fireworks. In a short time Mrs. Hood was good enough to give me that best proof of friendship which consists in being able to remain silent in presence of another, without embarrassment, if the mood of silence

is upon one; and I soon began to see that she was one of those brilliant talkers who require a gallery. George Hood himself had practically said as much to me, without any intention of finding fault or hinting at disappointment or disillusion in his wife's society. And yet I felt that he had suffered a certain disillusion, notwithstanding. It was so like him to expect the too much and the impossible, that I was in no way surprised. The flint must find the steel with its edge fresh, and not dulled by use, if it is to give its most flashing response. In spite of his disillusion, Hood was immensely proud of his wife, and loved her, as it was in him to love, with an affection that was always at work to idealize its object. Nevertheless he had not long been back in London before I found that he was losing all that he had seemed to recover of his old indolent and comfortable repose. The nerve strain appeared to hold him again in its grip, and his eyes had the suggestion of wakefulness at night, which is so pitiful to see.

I have written that it was pitiful, and it

was now, just at this point of his career, that an immense pity for him began to take hold on me. It was one thing to feel the emotion of poignant anger against him as I looked at the lovely sad face on the sand-hills; but when I saw his own face scarcely less sad, I became in a sense the more pitiful because I knew him to bear the additional pain of the consciousness that his grief was of his own making, arising out of the sadness of heart that I felt sure he must be suffering on account of the grief that he had brought upon Gracia. I supposed that I could analyse his feeling accurately, thus: he had sinned against the one woman, being resolved to bear as he might with the remorse of conscience on her account; and, thus having acted, found the reward of his sin—that is to say, the society of his wife—less valuable to him, less pleasant to him, than he had anticipated. Pleasant he found her companionship, no doubt; but the value, in drawing out that which was best in him, in keeping him ever at his intellectual best, perhaps with some brilliant eventual result

that the world would recognize—that imagined value he found to be delusive. And as he became conscious of his disappointment, he became at the same time conscious of the tie that he had formed for himself by this new form of contract with a woman, leaving him so much less freedom than that former one. I could perceive him chafing in the bonds of social convention that he had forged for himself—and had knowingly sinned in forging, in that he had given grievous pain by so doing to a woman who had offered up her life to him—as his wife demanded his escort for this or that party or this or that country-house visit that had no attractions for him. His wife loved him, and she was an American, either of which alone perhaps would have sufficed to make her *exigeante*; the two together conspired to add an element of jealousy to her *exigeance*. There followed as a matter of inevitable course, the small, the injudicious, and the untimely recriminations on her part of the "Ah, it does not amuse you to be with me" type that is so familiar and

more than slightly vulgar in its banality. Suspicions followed on the part of the wife, suspicions absolutely groundless, as I believed, so far as concerned any infidelity even of thought on the husband's part, yet suspicions which necessarily meant weariness and boredom for the husband and a possible turning of his heart for brighter companionship and friendlier sympathy to other women, which in itself might afford ground for the very suspicions that had been in great measure the cause of such first turning. Moreover I had to confess to myself that I could recognize some real grounds, of the negative kind, for Mrs. Hood's suspicions, for I was myself surprised by her husband's frequent absence from the house. In a business man, or a professional man, possibly in a golf player, it would have been intelligible, but Hood was none of these. He was much of an indoor man, and yet I seldom found him at home. Once or twice his wife had said to me, not without a sub-acid flavor in the tone, "I never see George now; he is so much away."

Then I inquired where he went. She looked at me a moment as if surprised that I should ask; then said, "I do not know. I do not question him."

From what I had observed and had heard when husband and wife were together I knew that this was not precisely an accurate statement, but without doubt the lady believed it as she made it. On the contrary, being, I have said, an American, and also a woman in love, she often subjected her husband to a catechism that I, as a bachelor, deemed extremely troublesome and also extremely injudicious. George Hood writhed under the questioning, but on the whole bore it well, with his usual humorous cynicism, and had the wit to throw it off lightly in his answers. Seriously taken it would have been intolerable. I wondered that Mrs. Hood did not attempt to get information from one whom she looked on as her husband's chief friend, but she always spared me her questions. One day, however, she spoke of a picture shop, close to the club, at which she had seen an old print that she admired. "I

was in a hurry when I was passing," she said. "Some day I mean to go in and look at it carefully and ask the price."

"Let me look at it for you and ask," I suggested.

"Oh, no," she answered carelessly. "I will get George to do it. He is so often at the club."

"At the club!" I exclaimed. "Why, he is never there!"

The very slighest, yet sufficiently significant, change of expression passed across Mrs. Hood's face for a moment and was gone again; but it had been enough to make me regret keenly the careless truth I had blurted out. She had fairly caught me in a trap, and the fact that she went on with perfectly unchanged tone to discuss the points of the print with which she had ground-baited her trap, filled me with a sense of uneasy doubt whether I had often before been snared by her in like manner—only more subtly—so that I had not even felt the teeth of the trap and had been unaware of the trapping. Had she pursued the subject of George's

attendance, or non-attendance, at the club further I should have feared her less, though to have done so would really have proved her yet more subtle, for it would have concealed her subtlety. As it was, I determined henceforward to be on my guard, but already I knew that my first guard had been passed.

The inferences to be drawn were obvious. George was absent from his house during hours for which he did not give full account when questioned by this wife whose *exigeance* evoked much questioning, or if the account was full it was fallacious, for if he implied that he was often at the club the implication was a false one. I asked other members if they had seen him there, and inquired of the hall porter; the answers were unanimous, that he came hardly ever. Of course this was not the only club in London of which he was a member, but it was the one which Mrs. Hood had indicated distinctly that she understood him to use.

One night, however, or, more strictly speaking, in the small hours of one morn-

ing, it did happen to me to see him at the club. One by one those with whom I had talked and smoked or played bridge had gone, and I was waiting lazily on, only wondering when I could rouse myself enough to walk the few hundreds of yards to my rooms, when George Hood's familiar voice aroused me, and even as I recognized it I noticed at the same time that it had in it a peculiar timbre. It rang with a clear resonance that was not usual, and the words came quicker, free from his habitual lazy drawl. The substance of his speech too was not altogether like him.

"I am so glad," he said, "to find you alone. I want to have a talk with you. My wife has been doing me the honor of being jealous of me. It was a high compliment, of course, but it is boring."

"Yes?" I said. "Who is the lady?"

He laughed in genuine amusement at the question. "That is just it," he said. "*Cherchez la femme.* That is exactly what my wife is doing. It is exactly what I do not know—what no one knows. It is amusing."

"You said just now that it was boring?"

"So it is. It is both in turns—like life. What I said first is more true than what I said last. It is more boring than amusing."

"You are rather enigmatical. Can you not put it all a little more plainly, with a little more detail?"

"I don't know whether I can. It is very late. Do you want to go to bed? For my part I never felt more wide awake in my life."

"I was fearfully sleepy a minute ago, before you came in. I am quite wide awake too now. We cannot talk here all night, though. They will want to shut up the club. Come over to my rooms. We shall be quiet there."

CHAPTER XIX

FUMES OF OBLIVION

As we crossed the street he passed his arm through mine. In another man this might have meant nothing, but it was a form of masculine caress that I had never known my friend to use before, and confirmed the impression given me by his words that he was not in quite a normal state. Before we had left the club I had glanced at him sharply to see whether he had been dining or supping too well. I had never had such an idea about him before, and a look had been enough to assure me that there was no ground for it now. His step was perfectly steady, his hand as it lay on my arm was firm, and he spoke with a fluent speed and lucidity that argued an even and exceptional clearness of head.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked, as soon as we were in my rooms.

"Matter with me! Nothing," he said, looking at me keenly, almost with suspicion, so that I feared for a moment that my unguarded question might quench the source of his fluent speech. But the impulse of his mood was too insistent to be stayed, and he had scarcely sat down in his chair before he began his explanations.

"My wife, I have told you, does me the honor to be jealous of me. Possibly you may have noticed it—that she takes me to account for all the minutes of my day, and of all of them, it is true, I cannot give an account. I think if there was one mood of a woman more than another that would dispose me to seek consolation in other feminine sympathy it would be just this. Lately, it is true, she found a reason, or what she deemed to be a reason —I am certain of the fact, for I noticed a change in her mood to me directly after the very moment of the incident—for an access of her doubts. By an unfortunate coincidence she came into my study at

the moment that I was reading a paper which it was imperative that she should not see. I had no resource but to scuffle it away as best I could into the drawer in my bureau, in the hope that she would not notice my action. She did notice it. I knew directly that she had seen it by her glance of suspicion, and I knew for some time afterwards that she had seen it and had drawn certain inferences from it by the change in her attitude to me. Is all that interesting? Not very interesting yet, I think. Had that been all it would be a very uninteresting story, extremely banal—just a woman's letter to a man that he could not or would not show to his wife. I did not come to tell you a nursery tale like that. What was interesting was Olga's own action and its *dénouement.* She had me watched by detectives, and at length she found, I suppose, what she wanted, or what she did not want; she found, at least, where I went to in those absences of which she wearied me so to give her an account. And when she found out she was, I sup-

pose, more or less happy. At all events she has been entirely different to me."

"In what way different?"

"If I explain to you, you must understand clearly that it is explanation only, not complaint. Heaven knows that it is not I that have ground for complaint against my wife in our relations. Entirely the contrary is the case; it is she that has all the ground for complaint. I have very much indeed for which to be grateful to her; but at one time, until she had satisfied her mind by her discovery, she was — what shall I say? — well, trying. She was difficult. 'Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,' the hackneyed old words of the poet who knew women so well, have not been beaten. Perhaps that might describe it best. Nothing that I did, or did not, was right. There was no pleasing her; and as I have said, and as you have seen, she catechised me endlessly. Perhaps if I had sworn at her it would have been better for both of us, but I have not the faculty in me of swearing at a woman; and, besides, she had a

show of right because I could neither account fully for my goings nor had the strength of mind to tell her roundly I would not be questioned. You see the *impasse.*"

"No," I said, "I do not. I do not see that you have, or had, arrived at an *impasse* at all. I have not yet been given any reason why you could not explain your absences to your wife. That would have been a way out, and until I understand more fully, it is obliged to seem a simple one."

He nodded at this, with a smiling comprehension. "Until you understand more fully," he repeated. "You quickly shall." He got up from his chair. "It is a warm night," he said. "Will you come for a little walk, or drive, if you like, with me? Then I will show you."

I think with any other man of my acquaintance I should have parleyed and asked explanations, perhaps made excuses. With Hood I was so used to acting on his suggestions and to find reward in the interest of the revelations they resulted in,

that it hardly occurred to me to parley. The sleepy mood had long passed and I was quite inclined for a stroll with an unknown goal.

There are certain reasons, which will be quite obvious, for not indicating the goal precisely. We went across Piccadilly Circus through those curious streets that are haunted by the theatrical people, passing through Covent Garden, where the night wanderers were yielding to the awakening business of the great market, vans already arriving from suburban gardens, and cart horses steaming out on the chill of coming dawn. We stopped at the door of a large house in a mean street. Hood looked back down the street to see that no one was following immediately, and knocked twice and gently. The door was opened after a few seconds by a weary-eyed, foreign night-porter, who gave Hood a candle, without a word passing, and nodded. We went up the stairs. A faint but pungent smell pervaded the place. Hood opened a door on the first-floor landing and we went into a room of which

the only piece of furniture at all remarkable was a low wide couch running most of the length of one wall. The sickly pungent smell was stronger here than on the stairs.

"You know what the smell is, I suppose?" he said, as he watched me inhaling.

"I am not sure," I answered with hesitation.

"Oh, yes you are," he said with a nervous laugh. "It is opium."

I understood. I understood that this was his way of making confession to me, whom he had come to look on rather in the light of his father confessor. I understood that he had chosen this way, the way of showing me the fact, rather than make the difficult, the degrading, confession in words. I looked, I saw the wretchedness of it. I realized all that it meant, the shame; disgust and pity strove together for the chief place in my heart, and I stood silent, finding no word to say.

"Can you bear it?" he asked. "Shall

we sit here a little while or shall we go outside? I want to tell you about it." He spoke in a strangely humble way, as if with a sense of his degradation, and an anxiety that was pitiful to hear my verdict on him.

"I think, if you don't mind," I said, in a tone that I felt to be cold and unsympathetic, "that I would rather go outside." Then I added, my heart smiting me with a deep pity for him, "By Heaven, I am sorry for you."

He did not answer that, and we went out again into the summer night, now turning to dawn.

"That is the explanation," he said, presently. "That is the mistress of whom my wife was jealous. She knows it now—I know that she knows it—and she too, like you, is sorry for me—is good to me. It is more than I deserve."

"As for what you deserve I do not know," I said, "but there is another feeling towards you in which Mrs. Hood and I must share, that is in the determination to help you to free yourself from this"—

it seemed better to leave the pronoun by itself to indicate my meaning.

He shook his head sadly. "I do not know," he answered. "I am afraid it is impossible. I am a slave, fast bound. Several times I have done my best to shake off the fetters, but they have always fastened again on me. I know myself too well to have any hope, even with your good help and Olga's."

"How did you come to it?" I asked.

"How did I come to it? By gradual steps, such as, I suppose, are the beginnings of most descents that are precipitous enough in the end. In the first place I took it as a kind of medicine. My heart gives me trouble at times, and pain—it is an inheritance from my father, I suppose—and the opium allayed it. Then I have had troubles, troubles a good many of which you know, but some—one in particular—that you do not know. Perhaps I shall tell you some day, and when I do you will think even worse of me, if that is at all possible, than you must think now. I do not mind. I never did mind much, show-

ing the worst of myself to you; and they say that the opium habit takes all self-respect from a man. I can quite believe it. And besides the actual troubles that are objective, there is the subjective trouble of a brain that never rests. I know you have thought of me—you have even spoken to me of myself so sometimes—as possessing a peculiarly blessed faculty for doing nothing. I can assure you you never were more mistaken. I do not believe there is another man in the world so absolutely incapable of doing really nothing, of letting his brain be at rest from the continual treadmill of thought, as I. And this drug enables my brain at least to be at rest. That is its negative boon. But it has many others on the positive side. It is the mistake of most of you others, who never have lived in the world that lies on the other side of the opium haze, to think that all it does for you is negative, soothing, narcotic. It has its stimulating, energizing influence too. Of course I am not so foolish as to deny that the reaction is terrible, that the sum total of the effect

is perdition. I am not walking on the down gradient blindfold."

Unless one has the misfortune to be a person with no interest whatever in human nature, in which case the world must be a very dull place to live in indeed, it must be obvious that I had here, in the household of two in Berkeley Square, as satisfactory a problem for study as life often has to offer. Up to a certain point I had traced with grieved sympathy, the course of my friend's married life running, as it so often does, in a world of human misunderstandings, according to one or other version of the never-old comedy of *Much Ado about Nothing*—husband and wife truly attached to each other, yet drifting miserably apart. There arrived a definite moment at which all this was changed. I was aware of the change, even before the moment and the reason of it were revealed to me by my visit under Hood's guidance to his opium den. Up to that moment Mrs. Hood had treated her husband with a petulance and a disposition to find fault and make difficulties that were extremely

trying for him, as I had no doubt, but yet were by no means inconsistent, in my judgment, with a very real affection. Starting straight away, as I was able now to recognize, from the moment when she made the pitiable discovery which Hood himself had revealed to me, she became good to him, with a protecting half-motherly tenderness that was infinitely touching to witness for one who knew, as I knew, its motive source. The situation had, besides, its piquancy; for while Hood was fully aware that his wife was acquainted with his degrading weakness, she was playing her part in blissful unconsciousness that he knew her to be aware of it. I learned from Hood that she had said nothing to him of her knowledge, and made no direct attempt to deter him; but she laid herself out with a tact that she had not shown before, and a devotion that was unmistakable, to devise any amusement or interest that her husband could enter into, with the view, no doubt, of occupying his thoughts so that his temptation should have less opportunity to attack him.

In the meantime, while she said nothing, I was learning by degrees the fatal extent to which the habit had hold of my poor friend. Of course I did my best, the little futile best that in the like cases is the utmost one can do, to induce him to desist from it, reiterating all the very obvious arguments which he knew by heart, and had conned over to himself a thousand times, the necessity of taking a grip on himself, and so on. The arguments were obvious and anything rather than original, but there is a singular quality in the human mind by which arguments that are perfectly well known come to have a fresh force by repetition. It is the quality on which all the force of suggestion depends. By the reiteration of these very commonplace arguments, aided and abetted very powerfully by the tender solicitude of his wife, which the very fact that she had the delicacy to conceal her knowledge of his fatal habit made perhaps the more appealing, it did appear to me that some ground was being gained, that Hood was strengthening himself, I knew at the

cost of a severe struggle. He told me with satisfaction that he was placing longer and longer intervals between his visits to the vilely smelling den in Soho, and that the visits were shortening in duration. I began to have a hope. And then, all in a day—I knew not for a long while by what disastrous accident—the whole course of the drama in which my rôle was that of chief inspector altered. Two days before I had seen Hood and his wife together and they had been cheery—she gently solicitous, he with his charmingly humorous response—just as I had known them for some while past. Two days later I came to dine with them at home to make up a party of four for bridge. I had not been two minutes in the room before I was aware of a change in the atmosphere. The change was in Mrs. Hood. Her manner to her husband had changed at once from that of a woman with whose love an element of the protective and the maternal feeling mingles. It had changed to the manner of a woman firmly resolved to do her duty to the man she has married,

to behave with a correctness to which no exception could be taken. But all the tenderness was gone. In its place was a courtesy, a coldness, a distance that hardly was consistent even with affection.

It was evident to me, who knew him so well, that Hood perceived the changed manner—it was inevitable that he should do that. What was not so essentially in the nature of things was that he was no less evidently taken aback by it. Clearly he had no knowledge of its cause. Again and again, in the course of the evening, I saw him glance at his wife in surprise at her glacially polite tone. At other moments I would find her, thinking that she was unobserved either by him or me, looking at her husband with an air of scrutiny and study, as if she had made some new discovery in the depths of his heart, and was seeking an explanation or a fuller account of it. The situation was an intensely interesting one, but painfully distressing. The moment was a crucial one in George Hood's life—that I realized very clearly. If he relapsed now there would be little

chance indeed of his salvation, and few days only had gone, since the bridge party at which I had observed the change in his wife's manner, when I met him again, and was shocked by the alteration in his looks. All the old signs were there; the pallor, the bistre circles below the eyes, the laxity of the facial muscles, that told of a relapse to the worst depths of his besetting weakness.

Clearly he was aware of his state, and was ashamed of it, for he would hardly speak to me or meet my eyes, in which he found perhaps some quite unintentional hint of accusation.

And if he was thus changed by the sudden withdrawal of his wife's tenderness, a change scarcely less apparent and painful was to be read on her face also. That she had suffered some kind of shock was very obvious.

At their small dinners she was as charming a hostess as before; beautiful, with her tall, sinuous figure and refined face; but her husband's humor was no longer the steel that the flint of her wit struck

upon. For him, or in response to him, she had no word to say except the banal words that were necessary, and her face, like his own, began to wear the pitiful unmistakable signs of the nerve strain—the dark rings below the eyes and all the rest. It is a strain that the more delicate physical nature of the woman does not withstand as a man's constitution withstands it; and within a few weeks of the day on which I first noticed the remarkable change of Mrs. Hood's manner to her husband the signs of suffering and illness in her face grew distressing.

CHAPTER XX

THE SECOND MRS. HOOD

ONE day that I had been at luncheon with Hood and his wife at Berkeley Square he had gone out early and left us alone together. She sat silent for awhile, and answered only in monosyllables when I spoke to her. Suddenly, as if she had at length made up her mind to a course that she had long been debating, she asked:

"I suppose you knew George's first wife?"

In my utter surprise at the question thus thrown at me unawares, I could do nothing more than murmur a helpless "Yes."

"What was she like? Who was she? Why have I never been told of her?" She asked the questions quickly, excitedly, almost hysterically.

I got up from my chair and walked a pace or two about the room to regain my own calmness before answering.

"Don't you think," I said then, "that your husband is the person to whom you ought to address these questions?"

"No," she replied, "no, I do not,"—and now there was a firmness and decision in her voice that had their source in anger. "These are not questions that I ought to have to address to my husband or to anybody. They are questions that never ought to have arisen to be asked. The answers to such questions ought to have been given me long ago, before I was married, unasked."

Her indictment was most painfully true. I had no word of valid defence to oppose to it. "And since," she said, "my husband has not thought it well to tell me these things, I am asking you, who are his friend and apparently in all his secrets, to tell me. Or am I to suppose that a conspiracy of silence has been formed against me—that I am to receive no enlightenment as to these facts

which, after all, do somewhat concern me?"

"There is no conspiracy of silence, certainly not," I said, in a manner that I felt to be weak and hesitating. "But I do not really know how much I ought to say—how much I am at liberty to say."

She shrugged her graceful shoulders disdainfully. "It does not seem to me that such a position as that is very inaccurately described as a conspiracy of silence."

"Let me speak, Mrs. Hood. Let me explain," I pleaded. "There is no conspiracy — there is no compact between George and myself that I shall keep silence about what I know of his private affairs. He never has demanded any promise of secrecy from me about them. And yet I know quite well that he understands that I look upon that knowledge as confidential. Therefore, I do not feel myself wholly at liberty, without his leave, to speak to you on these subjects.

"At the same time I have this feeling no less strongly—in fact, far more strongly

—that you ought to be informed about it all; that it would have been far better had you been informed about it long ago, before you married. I even went so far as to recommend this course to George, and I understood from him that he intended to follow it; but it does not seem that he did so."

"Understood from him that he intended to follow it; but did not do so!" she repeated. "How well I know that impression which he is so skilful in imparting, and which leads to absolutely nothing! Your ideals of honor and confidence in friendship are very lofty," she continued with irony. "Will they permit you at least to tell me this—why George's father objected so much to his marriage? Was she not a lady?"

"I think that was the father's objection," I said, after a moment's thought.

"But even so, what reason was there for all this mystery? Why should I not have been told?"

"Mrs. Hood," I said earnestly, "I think it would have been better, infinitely

better, if there had not been any mystery at all — if you had been told everything."

"Then why will you not tell me everything now—at least," she said, correcting herself, "as much as you know? How much you know, how much I know, how much there may be behind, I suppose no one knows except my poor husband himself."

That last phrase struck my attention—"my poor husband." Much cause as she might have, and actually had no doubt to blame her husband, there remained in her heart some of that "pity which is akin to love" if she could use the epithet "poor." I found myself debating this in the recesses of my mind, even while my more superficial mental activities were engrossed with the question that she had put to me —why should I not tell her everything, so far at least as I knew it? And I believed that I knew all there was to tell. After all, I was bound to no secrecy; I disapproved of the entire course of action of my friend, and especially of that part of it

which consisted in making a mystery to his wife of his past life. He had even acquiesced in my suggestion that it would be far better for his wife to be informed of everything. I could therefore reasonably argue that I was only acting as he had formally approved, in being the medium for his wife's information. Still I temporized. The idea of betraying a confidence tacitly reposed in one is not an idea that becomes pleasant by virtue of a few cold arguments decking it with a show of justification.

"Ask me questions," I said at length; "I will answer them if I can—that is, if I feel that I can."

I detected, and without surprise, a scornful curl of the lady's finely cut lip at the weakness that permitted me this compromise with my conscience.

"Please don't do violence to your sentiments," she said, in a tone that made me feel as Joseph Surface should have felt if he had any sense of shame in him. "What was her name?"

"I don't know," I said, "what her

surname was. Her Christian name is Gracia—she is a Spaniard."

"Is! Was, you mean."

"Is, still is," I persisted.

"You mean"—she looked at me with eyes dilating with horrified astonishment —"that she is alive still!"

I nodded.

"Then my husband—— !" she gasped. "Do you mean to tell me that I am not married?"

"Oh, no, no," I said, even in the midst of this scene of staccato emotion scarcely able to refrain from smiling at the idea suggested. "George is not quite as bad as that."

"You mean there was a divorce?"

"I mean that there was never a marriage—a legal marriage."

"Oh!" She sat silent a while, thinking, I could fancy, with relief, on the changed view-point of the situation to which this intelligence brought her. Then she said, looking at me keenly, "Is that true?"

Clearly it was no game of compliments

and fine phrases that we were playing. The words came as the heart prompted them.

"Yes," I said simply, "it is quite true."

"Forgive my asking such a question," she said, realizing that it was not quite within the social conventions. "I had reasons, I have reasons, for thinking that there was a marriage."

"And I have George's word," I said, "for knowing that there was not."

"For knowing," she repeated, with an emphasis that indicated clearly a possibility that "knowledge" might have sounder foundation.

I shrugged my shoulders. After all, this was a view that had not before occurred to me—that George might have deceived me and his father, too, all along, in this matter. We were dealing with a tangled skein, and my faith in my friend was not strong.

"Where is she now, this woman?"

I was able to answer truly that I had not the most vague idea. Then came the feminine question that was inevitable—I

think an Englishwoman would have asked it sooner—"what age is she? Is she good-looking?"

In form these were two questions, in fact, they were one. I was on the point of answering unguardedly that she was by far the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Luckily I reflected in time that any such appreciation could only aggravate the situation.

"Yes," I said, "she is certainly good-looking."

"And young?"

"And young."

She paused for a moment before her next question, and both from her hesitation and from her tone when she did ask it, I knew that the asking cost her an effort.

"Do you know whether George has seen her since our marriage?"

"I am quite certain that he has not," I said.

"Thank you," she answered. "I know by your tone that you are glad to be able to tell me that."

She asked me then whether there were

any children, and I told her about the boy. From that she led me to give a full account of the extraordinary gypsy life, the circumstances under which the gypsy marriage had taken place, and so on. My conscience reproached me at times, in course of the recital, with violating George's confidence; but, after all, I had, as I told myself again, never promised secrecy; the whole story was one that I had strongly advised should be disclosed to the wife before marriage, and I had understood George to acquiesce in that counsel. Both for him and for her I deemed it far better that the truth should be told her, and with these reflections I stifled as best I might any reproaches that my conscience suggested.

When I had told Mrs. Hood all that I had to say, she was silent for a long while. Then she said, "After all, it is no more than many other men have done before marriage, is it?"

"No more, no worse, certainly," I replied.

"But I do wish that he had told it to

me all himself. I would have forgiven him."

"Yes," I said, "I wish he had."

She reflected again, silently, before her next words, which surprised me when they came. "I have humiliated myself sufficiently, have I not, in asking these questions?"

"I don't know that you have humiliated yourself," I said. "I am very sorry for you."

"That is practically the same thing—I have appealed to your pity. Well, it has not failed me, and I am very grateful. Oh, I am very grateful," she repeated earnestly. "I cannot tell you how grateful I am, nor how much I want a friend. I am here, a woman in a strange country. I do not make friends very easily. I could not ask you to be my friend if I did not know how much of a friend you were to George. You have told me much about the husband; I am going to tell you something now about the wife, if you will have the kind patience to listen to it."

Certainly I would listen; but as for

friends, American though she was, I could imagine no Englishwoman having more. Her acquaintance was enormous, and one of the charms of the small dinners at the Hoods' was the uncertainty who or of what class might be one's fellow guests. The party might be political — cabinet ministers and their wives. It might be artistic — painters or sculptors without their wives; or, if the artists were feminine, without husbands; for art and matrimony are not good friends. It might be musical. It might even be smart, with decorative people whose heads were empty but their chatter glib in its own small circle, and their laughter ready to respond to very little wit. The only thing that they seldom were was financial, for the hosts were too well off and too unlike their neighbors to want to speculate, or to give dinners in exchange for those Stock-Exchange tips which generally are so cheap to those who give them and so expensive to those who take them. And often there was a most admired and surprising confusion of these various ele-

ments. This, if it can be done with success, is the very triumph of the dinner giver, but it requires an extraordinary social gift on the part either of host or hostess to bring successful harmony out of the elements of such discord. Mrs. Hood had these extraordinary qualities as hostess. George in large measure had them as host, and thus their parties were a joy.

But all this does not make friends, as Mrs. Hood said truly when I suggested to her that she, of all women in London, had not the right to talk of herself as friendless, though it means an enormous acquaintance. It was quite possible withal that she might be, as she said, in lack of a friend, and there was a distinct reason that she should make me her confidant in the fact that so much had been confided to me already. With me she had but to take up the parable with the beginning of her married life. There was little in George Hood's previous life that was unknown to me—or so I ventured to suppose. But it was of the wife, not of the

husband, ostensibly, that Mrs. Hood had to tell me.

"I don't think," she said, in the slightly nasal tone that seems to give an air of added reflection and value to what an American says, "that an American girl" (she pronounced it "Amurrican," but it is tiresome to insist on these accentuations) "begins married life with quite the same ideas as an English girl. She has illusions, of course, but they are not precisely the same illusions. She does not imagine that she is marrying an angel and going to Paradise straight away, but she does imagine that she is marrying something that she is going to make do what she wants it to do. An English girl does not begin with that idea. She begins with the contrary notion—that she *ought* to do what her husband wants her to do. Whether she intends to do it, and whether she does it, are quite another story. The illusion I began with was that I was going to make George do what I wanted him to do.

"The worst sign in him was, and I

ought to have recognized it from the beginning, even before we were married, that he never fought. He always seemed to be giving in, to be taking it lying down, whatever I had to give him. And yet, if I had only realized it, he never did what I wanted of him after all, not in the least particular. Or if he did, he just did enough of it to keep me quiet, so long as it did n't matter to him; but directly it began to matter, from his point of view, I never moved him an inch. Loved me! Well, I suppose he did, all the time; but made a fool of me all the time, for all that, and made the bigger fool of me just because he let me think all the time that I was making a fool of him. If I had recognized strength of character in him, in doing all this, I could have borne it better; but George's is not a strong character. His very method of getting his own way showed that. But I must say that I do admire George. I think he is the cleverest man I ever met."

"I quite think so too," I said.

"And the most useless; the man who

will have done least good in his generation, who will just go out of life without any one noticing, and will not have made a cent's worth of difference, at least not the right sort of difference, to the world by his life."

"I 'm afraid that would be just about the truest epitaph that could be put over most of us," I said.

"Yes, but not above most that are as clever as George," she replied with conviction. "There are not so very many that are as clever."

"You told me you were going to tell me about the wife, not the husband," I said.

"And so I am," she answered. "I am telling you what a fool the wife was, in what she thought of the husband and of what she was going to make of the husband. Perhaps you 'll think that I did n't love him—that I don't love him—because I can talk so. You 'd be very wrong if you did think that. I believe there was a time when I did n't love him, and I 'll tell you why. I failed—I failed with George

—failed to make what I wanted out of him. I don't know what I wanted exactly. I wanted something celebrated—a cabinet minister, or premier, or something of that kind. Well, of course, George was not cut out to go on those lines—I ought to have known that from the start; but I was a fool, as I say. So George continued to go his own way, and when I found that, I got annoyed with him, and I dare say I let him see it, and then he sought the friendship of other women—that is what I could not stand, but I see now it was all my own fault that drove him to it, my misunderstanding of him and my thinking that I could make him do what I wanted, and then being vexed when I found I could n't, and letting him see that I was vexed; and after that of course, when he was disappointed in me, he tried to find the ideal woman who would n't disappoint him. I don't mean to say, you know, that he went out deliberately woman hunting or ideal hunting; I don't mean that, but he 'went a-roaming' in a dissatisfied way, trying

for comfort, not knowing in the least what comfort it was he wanted. Oh, it must be funny being a man! Perhaps there is one thing, though, that seems more funny to you—being a woman."

"It must be funny being a woman, no doubt," I assented.

"So it is, but it is not always amusing—not to oneself at least. I think you would not believe, perhaps you could not, being a man, how I used to torment myself when I saw George wanting the companionship of other women."

"Oh, I don't know about that," I said. "I don't think that jealousy has any particular sex."

"And I 'm sure it has," she maintained. "It is far worse for a woman. I was mad, I think, with jealousy—I suppose jealousy is the right name for it—and I think I was not well; for a long time I was bothered with sick fancies, and thought George was in love with every woman he spoke to. I 'm sure it sent up my temperature of nights, thinking of it as I lay awake. And then I came into

George's room one day as he was sitting at his bureau, and as I came in he jostled a letter or something away in his hand and put it into a drawer and locked the drawer. That made me mad. I was as certain as if I had seen and read the letter that it was a letter which he did not wish to show me, from some woman. As if I should have cared to read it!"

"Yes," I said. "As if!"

She laughed. "Well, of course that's nonsense; that's only a way of saying. Of course I was dying to know what was in that letter really; but, equally of course, I took no notice at the time. I did not say anything to George. I pretended not to have seen him shovelling the letter away. Well, do you know, that happened twice. Twice it happened that I came into the room and found him reading a letter which he shovelled away into the drawer as soon as I came in. When he did it the second time, it seemed more than twice as bad as when he did it the first. I think it was then that I began to

hate George. I 've left off doing that now, you know."

I nodded.

"I said," she went on, "that I had humiliated myself before you. You did not seem to understand when I said it. I expect you understand now. At all events you will when I tell you what came next. You see the situation—there was I, twice I had seen my husband conceal this letter, and I suspected all sorts of things, and one day, when George had gone out, I came into his room and there were his keys lying on the open part of the bureau. You see now what I am going to tell you, that is so humiliating. Yes—there was the key and there was the drawer—I knew which the key was that opened it—and within was (or in all probability was) the letter that I was not meant to see. What I ought to have done was to go out of the room, out of the house, go to a theatre, to the dentist, to any amusement or pain or emotion that would take my thoughts away. What I did was this—I sat down in the room with my back to the bureau.

I would not look at it. But I saw it all the same, though my back was turned to it; and not only saw the bureau but actually seemed to see through the wood of the drawer and read the writing that I imagined written on the letter inside the drawer. Once I did go out of the room and slammed the door hard in the hope that it would bring a servant or somebody that would distract my thoughts and give me something else in my mind's eye besides that ugly square bureau and that glittering bunch of keys that seemed to have some hypnotic suggestion and magnetism in their gleams. But no one came. At length I went back on tip-toe, praying now that nobody might come to interrupt me, although only a few minutes before I had been hoping that somebody would come. I did not hesitate any longer. I went straight up to the bureau, took the keys and opened the drawer. The paper was there that I was looking for—I knew the look of it well. It was not at all of the nature that I had suspected it of being—but it gave me proof (I imagined it at least

to be proof) of what I had never for a moment suspected before, of George's previous marriage.

"It 's a pretty story is n't it?" she said ironically, as I made no comment when she paused.

"It is a very human story at all events, in some of its aspects."

"And so—she is still alive?"

"Yes," I said, knowing that the "she" could refer but to one person. "She is still alive?"

Mrs. Hood did not speak for a moment, and when the next words came they were a little enigmatic. She said:

"Is that the reason, I wonder? Poor George!"

"The reason of what?" I asked, though she had seemed to be speaking rather to herself than to me.

She did not answer at once. It seemed as if she were debating some question in her mind. Presently it appeared what the question at debate was, and the answer. She had been deliberating whether she should make further con-

fidences to me, and at length had decided to do so.

"I will tell you," she said. "You will see then why I am so greatly in want of a friend. I have told you something of what I found in that drawer—I seem to have been punished more than enough, do I not, for my wickedness in opening it? I found something else in it—an address that aroused my suspicions. It was the address of a house in Soho. After that, do you know what I did?"

"Not precisely," I replied, though I had a shrewd idea that I knew.

"I can hardly bear to tell," she said shamefacedly; "but since you know so much that is bad about me, you may as well know the worst. I was still half crazed, I think, with my suspicions as to what George did in the hours he was away from me—hours for which he could not, or would not, give an account. I had him watched by a detective to that house of which I told you I found the address, and do you know what I discovered?"

"Yes," I said, "my dear lady, I do know.

And I cannot tell you how deeply sorry I am for you—and for him."

"You know!" she exclaimed in great surprise. "What is there that you do not know about this poor husband of mine? Tell me this," she said almost fiercely, looking at me as if she would drag the truth, against my will if necessary, from me. "Do you know—have you been deceiving me all this time—do you know all that I found, all that I have not told you, in that paper that was in the drawer?"

I assured her so earnestly that I had not the most remote conception of what might be conveyed or concealed in the paper she spoke of that I think my manner, perhaps more than the words, carried conviction to her, and she began with a renewed trust in me, that had been momentarily shaken, to ask me the details of my knowledge of her husband's use of the drug, how long he had taken to the habit, how he had spoken when I urged him to refrain, and so forth. She spoke with such earnest solicitude that it was impossible for me to think that her love for him was dead, nor did she

show any of that loathing that might be almost natural towards one who was the victim of such a degrading weakness, although she fully seemed to realize the horror of it.

"You have said nothing to him yourself about it, have you?" I asked.

"Nothing as yet," she answered. Then, after a moment's pause, "I hardly feel as if I can."

"You will, Mrs. Hood," I said, as firmly as I could, and as gently. "It is not for me, of course, to point out to you the line in which your duty lies, but I am quite confident that you will. I am also confident that no one else's speaking can have anything like equal effect."

She took a turn or two in the room, abstractedly adjusting the combs that were in her bright hair. The final pat was a firmly decisive one. She had made up her mind.

"Yes," she said, "I will speak to him."

CHAPTER XXI

REMORSE

I WAS not able to convince myself to my satisfaction of the probable effect of the news I had been able to give her on Mrs. Hood's relations with her husband. In some measure I had put the matter in a more favorable light than that in which she had regarded it since her discovery of the incriminating paper. I had assured her that this was, in effect, no previous marriage of which she had been kept in ignorance, but was really rather one of those pre-nuptial and unlicensed liaisons which nearly every man who has found himself with money in a large city has formed in his youth, and of which he hesitates, perhaps out of a fine feeling of respect for her modesty, to say anything to his wife. From this point of view the

concealment is rather to be regarded as a tribute to her more refined nature than as an offence against honor and candor. On the other hand I had been obliged to tell her that, though this liaison belonged to a part of his life that her husband had wholly left behind him, still he was not so entirely severed from it as she had imagined by the great gulf of the death of the former object of his love. She lived still, still depended on and received his bounty. This reflection was one that might in the case of a wife of a jealous temperament, as I knew Mrs. Hood to be, make the situation more aggravated than before. From the way in which she received what I had told I augured that I had not done unwisely, in the interests of the mutual relations of husband and wife, to make this virtual breach of confidence of my friend's secret, but that augury was based only on Mrs. Hood's first acceptance. Further consideration might very conceivably have changed her view. It is true that she had spoken in the most affectionate way of her husband as we discussed

the possibility of aiding him to break from the fetters of the fatal habit in which he was fast bound; but all that was immediately after I had told her of the true interpretation to be placed on the discovery that she had made. The course of that discussion did not give her any leisure for the arrangement of her thoughts, and I was in secret dread as to the outcome of the inevitable process of her mental brooding over what she had heard. It was therefore a purest delight and relief to me, on my next meeting with Hood, when he began speaking in the lazy drawl that was his normal manner:

"The world is full of surprises, and to-day for a wonder I have had a pleasant one. For the most part I find them the reverse of pleasant. My wife has begun to treat me again like an old friend, not merely as if we had been introduced the day before yesterday."

Of course I knew precisely what he meant, but, equally of course, I could not quite say so. Well as I knew him, it seemed to be demanded of me that I

should affect to have perceived nothing left to be desired in his wife's manner with him at any time.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Of course, with his more than feminine quickness of intuition, he appreciated exactly the train of thought that had led me to the remark. He laughed, and then was good enough to say:

"If I knew what a gentleman was, exactly, I should say that you were always one. My wife has been to me," he went on, "with the air of one making a confession, to confide in me what I knew before, but of course I did not tell her so, that she had employed one of those lights of the earth called private detectives and had discovered who the mistress was that had some claims upon my time." So far he had spoken with the cynicism characteristic of him. He went on in a much more serious tone that proved him to be really touched: "I cannot tell you how kind and tender she was to me, praying me for her sake as well as my own to pull myself together and leave this blessed stuff for the

devil to smoke in hell, as I am very certain he does not, for then it would be hell no longer. And I have promised her, my friend, and I will renew my promise to you too"—he was speaking very solemnly now, as if he felt that he was making some kind of sacred vow, although I knew only too well how little there was that he held sacred—"that I will give up this blessed and accursed drug. I would swear it if I knew by what to swear. But we will leave it so without vain swearing. I will do my very best, both for her sake and for mine, as she said."

"And if you resolve your mind like that you will have strength. I am confident you will."

"Thank you, my friend," he said. "You are very good to me, both you and she. What, I wonder," he went on, speaking softly, as if to himself, "can be the reason of her changing to me so suddenly, and so completely—so delightfully."

I hesitated whether to tell him that I believed I knew the reason of the change, but in some measure this would have been

to betray her confidence, and I reflected that a woman does not forgive you as readily as a man will forgive, your breach of confidence, though it may be that a man will be a more faithful keeper of a confidence. And while I hesitated Hood resumed:

"Do I show any signs of it in my manner?" (There was no need to indicate more exactly the meaning of the "it.") "Do my eyes show it? Is my hand beginning to shake? Do you see signs of my brain going?"

"No, no, no," I said, "not that."

"I have often wished it would go. Yes, I have wished to heaven, often, that I might go mad. Then perhaps I might have some peace of mind. At present I have none."

"What is it that troubles you so? Gracia?"

"Gracia!" he said. "Yes Gracia!" His voice seemed to linger and dwell on the musical syllables of the Spanish name as if he found some comfort in the sound. "Do you not think it natural that my heart

and my conscience should be troubled about Gracia—about her and about my boy? I have not said much to you—not even to you who are my best friend—about it all. What use, after all, to try to translate one's emotions into the spoken word?" I might have answered him that I knew no man who made the attempt more often, or on the whole with more success. "But it is for you to judge, rather, and estimate what my feeling must be. After all, I have loved this woman. In a way I believe I love her still—no, not love, but I have the affection of a dear friendship for her, and, besides, she is the mother of my boy! I think of him, too, so constantly that between the two it seems to me as if my whole mind were obsessed by them, and I can have no room in it for other thought and other trouble. Yet I have so much more. Has it ever seemed curious to you that I have not been down to see them—Gracia, I mean?"

"Curious," I said, "not so much that you have not been down to see them

as that you have not seemed to want to."

"Have not seemed to want to," he repeated. "Yes, I suppose it must have seemed to you like that. It only shows how little one can appreciate the impression one makes on one's friends, even on those who are the most understanding. As for not wanting to go down and see them," he said, "it is a want, at times it has become almost a necessity, that has beset me daily, almost hourly. It has been by the strongest effort only that I have kept myself back and dissuaded myself from taking train to wherever they might be, and seeing them for myself. You tell me of the boy that he grows bigger, rounder, browner. His body is well. I am doing nothing for his mind and for his soul. What am I to do? How can I do anything? I am in the net of my own weaving. Can you understand the motives that have kept me from going to see them?"

"I think I can, in part," I said.

"The motives are two, and both are

women. Gracia is the one, Olga the other. As regards Olga, there would be neither *infidélité de cœur* nor *de corps*, as the French say, in my paying a visit to Gracia and the boy; but it would be better, more discreet—I feel that I owe it to her, as part of a very large debt due from me to her—not to. As for Gracia, you can understand, I think, how I shrink from seeing her, how I hardly could bear to see her, feeling that I have made her suffer deeply, out of her love for me, and yet how I long to see her! I expect you can understand. It is so hard not to see her—to see them both—and yet to see her I sometimes think would be harder still. It would be more than I could bear."

"She would have no reproaches for you," I said.

"No, no," he said bitterly, "she would have no reproaches; and that would make my self-reproach so much the sharper. That, too, you can understand. But it is amazing to me that you have not perceived all this without my telling you. When one feels something with a great intensity,

one has a natural disposition to think that it must reveal itself to a friend's sympathy. It only shows how easily one is mistaken. It is even satisfactory in some degree to find that one is less transparent than one had supposed. I have had wonderful lessons in my life from two women, and I have not deserved either of them."

"There cannot be the slightest doubt of that," I said, with a candor I knew he would not resent.

"After all, about Gracia—a man must be true to his own self, he must do the best for his own nature; that is the most sacred trust that has been given him; he must follow the dictates of his own 'dæmon.' Am I not right?"

"Whether you are right I do not know," I said. "I know at least that in saying this you are consistent with what you have always preached. But have you been as consistent in practising what you have preached, and if you have been consistent in the practice, are you, in your own life, a striking testimony to its excellence? After what you have just told me, that it has

brought you to this stage that you wish you could go mad, that so perhaps you might win peace of mind, can you say that your system is a success?"

"I know, I know," he said. "I am a fair argument against my principles. But I tell you it is not by reason of my system, and not so much by reason of my inconsistency, but of my cowardice, my lack of courage and decision in carrying it out, that I am such a fine argument against it."

"I don't quite follow," I said.

"No? Well, I will expound. It is marvellously simple. In the first place I was consistent enough; I followed the dictates of my 'dæmon,' as I believed, with Gracia. I do not reproach myself with that, I do not reproach myself that I did not marry her, but what I do reproach myself with is that, not marrying in any legal sense, I yet weakly allowed myself to go through a form with her which she undoubtedly believed to be a legal marriage. I ought to have taken my courage in two hands and said to her boldly: 'This is no binding marriage that we are making; we

are not bound to each other in any legal sense.' Had I done that, I might have been free of remorse now—I do not know.

"Again, it was merely in the obstinacy of a radically weak nature that I allowed my father to believe for so many years that I really was married to Gracia. In that I did him a fatal wrong, a wrong that without doubt embittered his life and hastened his death."

"You are not sparing yourself," I said. said.

He took no notice of this. "Once again, when I married Olga, my weakness and indecision prevented my taking the right course which you—and my 'dæmon,' as I am pleased to call him, too—urged upon me. Whether rightly or wrongly, I decided to marry Olga. In my circumstances—such as I had created them—the fact that I had acted wrongly in creating them did not affect the question—I believe I was right then in making that marriage. If you knew the ideals with which I entered upon it, I believe that even you too might think I was right in doing so.

Of my ideals of our intimate life together I need not speak. Of my ideals of our social life I may say that I imagined it would be entirely different from that which we see familiarly—the husband sitting in a silence, blighted by the presence of the wife, or the still more blighting spectacle of the husband eloquent while the wife sits admiringly listening to his every word. I had imagined a brilliant give and take of suggestion and response. Well—the reality you have seen. But, whether I acted rightly or wrongly in marrying, this at least is certain, that I acted wholly wrongly in not telling my wife at the outset all about my previous relations with Gracia. Some day she is bound to find them out. Maybe she has found them out already. What do I know? Sometimes there seems to be so little real sympathy between us, that it is impossible for me to know what passes in her thoughts."

I hesitated a moment, as I had done before, and had I hesitated longer I might have answered differently—or, again, not

at all—but this time I told myself that at least one cause of misunderstanding between these two I would sweep away at all costs, and exclaimed recklessly: "You may reassure yourself on that point. She knows it all already."

"Ah," he said quietly, "you told her!"

"No," I replied. "In the first instance, she found it out herself. Later I told her—when she questioned me—the truth. It was better she should know the real truth than the truth as she believed it to be. It was the wrong interpretation that she put on what she discovered that built up such a barrier between you. When she knew the real truth her love for you broke down the barrier in a moment."

"She found out for herself—how?"

The question put me into deep waters. To answer it I had to give away much of the confidential avowal made to me by the wife. I seemed in a position between the two in which I was constantly giving to the one the confidences of the other. The reckless mood was upon me still, and I

had the conviction that my betrayal was better than the lack of understanding which the lack of mutual confidence between them had produced. Even with this conviction I hardly know how I should have answered but for a glance at my friend. His pale, worn face had gone more pallid, as white as a sheet of paper. He repeated:

"How did she find out?"

"She found some letter or document, or something which virtually told her. It told her wrong, however. It told her you had been married; and she imagined it referred to a former marriage, which you had kept a secret from her, with a woman who was dead."

Preoccupied with the task of saying just enough, but not too much, I finished my sentence before I looked directly at my friend. To my horror I then saw him lying back in his chair, as pale as death, in a state of physical collapse. He was fumbling with his left hand at his waistcoat pocket, and let fall a tiny bottle which rolled without breaking to the floor. I

picked it up and read on the label, "To be taken in case of an attack." I pulled the cork out. "For you to take now?" I asked. He was too far gone to reply except by a very slight motion of his hand and a droop of the lids over the eyes, which I accepted as affirmative signs. He aided me feebly in putting the tiny bottle to his mouth, and drank off its contents. Then he lay back with closed eyes. His breath, which he had fetched in feeble gasps, came more evenly. Presently the tinge of color that passed with him now as the hue of health came back to his cheek; his face lost its absolutely death-like pallor. His eyes opened, he passed his hand over his forehead as if he were removing an oppressive weight. Then he smiled at me.

"That is better," he said in a low voice.

As soon as I saw him in a fair way of recovery I left him, at his own request, by himself, under promise that I would call to see him on the following morning, when he would be more master of himself, and able to talk to me. He had a hand-bell

within reach to summon a servant if any repetition of the heart attack occurred, but he assured me that its recurrence was not the least likely.

The next day, when I called, he seemed quite himself again, asserted manfully that he was perfectly well, and hardly would answer my inquiries in his impatience to resume the conversation which the attack had interrupted.

"You know what the document was, I suppose, which my wife found—which told her so much, and so much that was untrue?"

"No," I replied, "I do not know."

"She is a wonderful woman," he said with admiration. "I should not say that she was altogether a sympathetic woman," he went on with that passion for analysis which would never leave him, even on his death-bed. "It is hard for a brilliant woman to be really sympathetic. The one quality implies an interest in the words and acts of another person that is inconsistent with the other. The brilliant woman has no attention to spare: she is an

egoist. But my wife is a wonderful woman, a woman of wonderful goodness of heart, even if she is not truly sympathetic. You will see it when I tell you what the document was that she found."

"What was it?"

"It was my father's will: the will he made when we were on bad terms: the will that disinherited me: the will that I found on the table at home when I went to him and found him tearing up papers and dying in the act."

"But," I said, "but—I do not understand."

"No," he said. "You do not understand. You will in a moment, when I have explained to you—will understand, at least, as much as I understand myself. There are some things that I find too difficult for my understanding. When I went to my father, as I think I narrated to you, I found him in his study tearing up papers. He had a drawer, taken bodily from a cabinet, on the table beside him. Obviously he was glancing over a heap of papers before tearing them

up. Some had already been torn—the waste-paper basket at his side was half filled with the fragments. Amongst the papers, even under his very hand, was the will that he had made under the impression—in which I did so wrongly to let him remain—that I was legally married to Gracia, the will of which the main purport and purpose was my disinheriting. Do you remember that you once asked me whether this was among the papers already torn?"

"Yes," I said, "I remember perfectly."

"And what did I answer?"

"Nothing. You seemed as if"—I corrected myself—"you acted as if you had not heard."

"As a matter of fact," he said, "it was among those papers that were not yet torn."

He paused, as if he expected that I should make some comment, but I found none that seemed to be the suitable one to offer.

"It is you that say nothing now," he remarked.

"I do not quite know what I ought to say," I replied.

"I do," he replied. "What you ought to say—what at least seems the straightforward thing to say—is that I am a d—d blackguard; for of course it is evident enough to you that the provisions of that will which disinherited me never were acted on, and the inference is inevitable that I suppressed that will. I did. What I did was this—when the death-like collapse attacked my father I hurried to his side, but even before doing so I had noted the nature of the short document lying at his hand uppermost on the table, as if it were the very next paper in its turn for the tearing. The language of the law is not concise, but the clerkly writing is legible. Without a doubt of the general tenor of the document, I conveyed it to my pocket when I returned to put the papers in order so soon as all possible immediate aid had been given to my poor father. He never regained consciousness, as you are aware. A more careful reading of the document only confirmed my

first impressions. The rest you know. I suppressed the will. I acted as you say, like a blackguard."

"I did not say so," I observed.

"As you think, then, I will say," he replied, "and as all the world would think. And yet," he continued, crossing his legs and settling himself in his chair with a kind of luxurious enjoyment of the situation, "let us look into the circumstances of the case and examine them if we can without any prejudice. Let us dismiss myself, and the incident of my own benefit derived from the suppression of the will (it is only an incident in the ethical aspect) altogether. Let us suppose that I, having no interest in the will, one way or the other, came into the room as I did and found my father in the act of tearing up papers, and amongst them this will which I knew, not only from the fact of its being amongst the other documents that he was in process of destroying, but also from what he had said to me on many previous occasions, that it was his settled wish and intention to destroy,

suppose that I knew for certain that all his wishes and intentions would be frustrated if this document were to be promulgated as his last will and testament; what, in those circumstances, would it be my duty to do?"

The case assumed a singular aspect under his handling.

"If any circumstances could justify one in interfering with the course of law and justice," I began with a feeble sententiousness, "then perhaps——"

He interrupted me abruptly. "Interfering with the course of law—yes. Interfering with the course of justice — no. Say rather interfering with the course of injustice. Behind the law you must look to the intention in which the law is framed. The law respecting a man's will is framed with the intention that his wishes shall be carried out. You will perceive that in this instance those wishes would be directly frustrated by allowing the law to take its course."

"That is so, certainly, but yet——"

The sense of sanctity with which a

testament is invested in the mind of every rightly educated Englishman was too strong in me to allow me to give his argument its just weight, without prejudice.

"I believe," I said with slow reluctance, "that under the circumstances you may possibly have been justified in——"

"In what?" he asked, as I paused, scarcely liking to put my thoughts into words.

"In destroying the will," I said. "I presume that is what you did."

"Unfortunately," he replied, "that is what I did not do. I did not destroy the will, but I concealed it. I kept it. Ah!" he exclaimed bitterly, "if you knew me as you ought by this time to know me, as I know myself, you would know that it was not in my nature boldly to destroy the will. I have kept it, I have concealed it. From time to time I have taken it out and looked at it, though its phrases are seared into my brain. I have been on the point of burning it. Again I have been on the point of producing it, of showing it to you, to my wife, to all the

world, of confessing myself a thief, a felon. Ah, if you knew how the trouble of it all and the remorse has preyed upon me, you would not wonder that I had recourse to that blessed drug. That is the chief source of all the trouble of mind of which I said to you a little while ago I could not tell you, but of which the confession seems to have been wrung from me by the force of circumstances."

"And that is the document which your wife has seen and which told her—that you were married?"

He nodded. "And that is why I told you," he said, "that my wife was a wonderful woman. Just pause for a second and picture to yourself what this meant to her. She found this paper—I suppose I left the drawer open, I do not remember—at all events she found it, and, having found it, what was it that it told her? It told her I had been previously married—that, at least, was how she was bound to understand it—and naturally there would come to her, at that, a cruel sense that she had been deceived, kept in the dark.

That was bad enough. No doubt at that she felt her heart turned more than ever against me. But the will said this, that in consequence of my marriage I was disinherited — that was the English of it, stripped of its law jargon. So what did that practically mean to her, seeing that she knew very well that by the will that had been proved, a will of much earlier date, I was far from disinherited? It simply meant this, that I was concealing this will, that I was a thief, a felon, a criminal of the worst and lowest type—of course she knew nothing of my reasons for the concealment. Do you follow all that?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then what does this woman do, when she has discovered this? Remember that the very paper itself seemed to give her evidence that she had been unfairly dealt with, and remember, too, that there was already some misunderstanding between us. Did she denounce me? No. Did she treat me with scorn and contempt? No. On the contrary, her manner under-

went the most striking change towards me. She lost all her petulance and small fault-finding of manner, she never upbraided me for big shortcomings or for small, she was always courteous, always distantly polite. I did not understand it then, but I understand it now, and it was a manner that had in it all that was most dignified. It had more of consideration and friendship than I had any right to expect. And then, then," he repeated with energy, "even with all that knowledge of me, as soon as ever she discovered the real truth—out of your mouth, my friend; and I can never thank you enough for telling it to her—then she became tender and kind to me, doing all in her power, and, thank God, she has helped me very effectually, to save me from that dear, delightful, accursed drug. I seem to see now, by the light that is dawning on me, that my wife has a true woman's heart; and, do you know," he concluded earnestly, "there was a time when I was disposed to doubt it?"

"I suspected something of your small

misunderstandings," I said, "and was so grieved that I could do nothing to help you."

"You have helped me," he answered. "You have helped both of us in clearing away much of these misunderstandings. Ah, if I had had but the courage, before my life came to this!"

"Now that you know what my trouble has been," he continued, "then if you also knew, as I trust you never will, the relief, the respite, and the rest given by this blessed drug, you would not wonder at me —I think you would hardly blame me. As for the trouble, that you can perhaps imagine, after what I have told you; but as for the rest and the respite, I do not know—how can I explain? Listen—you remember the time when I made you lie on your back, down by the caravans in that blessed time, long ago, in the glades of Ashdown Forest, and made you look up through the blue at the fleecy clouds sailing overhead—you remember that sensation?"

I nodded.

"There is another that Nature can give you," he continued; "there are not many spots that can give it; it is not to be enjoyed everywhere, like the hypnotism of the blue depths of the sky. It requires for its accessories first the sea, and then a promontory running well out into the sea, on which you may sit or lie and watch the waves racing from you—not *at* you, as their similar aspect is. There, as you rest, you see the smooth convexities of their backs hurrying, hurrying away from you; and as you sit it seems rather as if the sea was the thing at rest and you were moving, smoothly, irresistibly, without effort, out to the open ocean. Something—that is to say, all the power of perception and speculation—seems to be drawn out of your brain, so as to leave it in a state of most blissful, restful trance, ready for the reception of the most beautiful visions which the unchecked imagination may suggest to it. Well, that, or something of that kind, is the blessed feeling that this drug gives you. It is comparable with none of the ordinary sensations of

life, for it is different from them all and more delightful than the best of them. That is the one world that I now live in; the other is such a world of mental torture as I don't suppose many other men have a conception of."

"It is sad, is it not?" I said, willing to take hold of the latter part of his speech, which I could understand, rather than the former, which was of a vague, dim world into which I followed with difficulty. "It is sad that you, of all men, should have come to such a phase of life, after so much sacrifice, ideals so high. You have made faithful sacrifice, as you believed, to your ideal of living, according to your 'dæmon,' of being true to your own nature, to its promptings, to yourself rather than to the conventions—and it is to this end!"

"Yes, to this end; but it is to my indecisions that I owe it all, rather than to the ideals I have followed. My sacrifice, if you please to call it so, or my following has not been faithful—that has been the great fault. After all, however, I am not going to admit to you that this is the end.

Thanks to Olga and to you I am making a good fight, really I do hope a winning fight, but it is a hard one. The sky is clearing of its clouds, though. There is, I think, only one cloud of serious misunderstanding left—that about the will. I cannot let Olga remain in her misconception as to the true state of that case."

"You mean——?" I asked not quite comprehending.

"I mean that at present, having read that will and having no means of knowing the tangle of motives that led in the end to my suppressing it, she must naturally look on me even as a bigger rascal than I am. I appreciate what all that implies, of course. She is a wonderful woman. It is wonderful that thinking as she does of me, she can still be so good to me. It is like the love of a dog, as it seems to me, that does not ask whether its master is the best or worst of men, but merely loves him; and the more, the worse he treats it."

"It will be hard for you," I said. "Would you like me to tell her?"

"No," he replied firmly, and nothing

could have shown me more clearly that at last he had a definite purpose to end the misunderstandings. "It is very good of you, but I will do this for myself. We will play the game of cross purposes no longer."

"She is not at home, is she," I said—"your wife?"

"No she is away motoring somewhere—I do not know where she has gone. I do not question her goings. She returns to-morrow, I think."

I was about to bid him good-bye when he called me back.

"After all," he said, "I will ask your help once again, so far as this, as to ask you to be present when I tell my wife about the will. The truth is that I never now can trust this foolish heart of mine. Of course there is nothing to be agitated about, but if my pulse should get beating a trifle quickly there is no saying at all what my heart would do. It is very foolish."

CHAPTER XXII

EXPLANATIONS

THREE days later, in answer to a summons, I called again at the house in Berkeley Square to make a third at the suggested interview between Hood and his wife. I was a little upset to find myself ushered into a room where Mrs. Hood was, alone. I feared that she might ask me all sorts of questions as to how much I had told George of what she had confided to me, and blamed George in my heart for his indiscretion in thus leaving me to the mercies of his wife's curiosity. I need have felt no such fear. Mrs. Hood was far too eager to tell me her own news to waste any time at all in hearing mine, and I soon guessed that she had contrived that we should have a few minutes alone together to give her the chance of telling it.

"I have been down in the West," she said, "in the car, and I have seen her."

"Her? Whom?" I asked, but I felt that I knew the answer.

"That woman, the gypsy—Mrs. Hood, as she calls herself." The words sounded harsh, but were said without the least rancour. "Yes," she went on, "I have seen her and I can pardon most freely both him and her. Or rather, I feel that there was nothing ever that needed pardon. She must have been—there is no question of it—one of the most beautiful women—in her style—in the world; I never saw a face to equal it in the beauty of feature; and the coloring must have been brilliant. But to ask a woman who believes that a man and a woman come into sympathy with each other by something better and higher than the mere bodily passion—to ask me, who believe that firmly, to be jealous of such a woman as that is to suggest an absurdity. Women have been jealous, I believe, of their husbands' love of a dog or a horse. I could not be—it

does not strike me as possible. And the love of and for such a woman as that is more canine than human. She could not speak to him, she has no words to say, no thoughts to utter that could appeal to the best that is in George's nature. I not only feel no jealousy that he gave some of his lower passion to that poor beautiful thing once—I even feel that if he were to give her that now I should be far less jealous than if I saw him, as I actually have seen him, engrossed, mentally and spiritually, in accord and communication with a woman of intellect. Then he might indeed be taking from me something of what is best in him that is due to me. As for the other—bah!"

"How did you find her?" I asked.

"It is not difficult," she said, "in a car. I knew from you the line of country I should find her in—down in the West—Blackmore's country, very nearly as far down as Kingsley's country—the Maid of Sker's country to be exact. That was exact enough. I soon got on track of the van, and once you get on track of a van,

and you in a motor, the hunt is not a very long one."

"Did you tell her who you were?"

"I am sorry," she said, "that you should have so poor an opinion of my sense. What I did was this—when we saw the van drawn up by the roadside we went past it once, just to make sure that it agreed with the description. Then, when we had gone a mile or so past, we turned again, and I said to the chauffeur: 'We 've got to break down just opposite that van you saw drawn up by the roadside close here.' He 's been with me quite a while and does n't ask questions. When we came abreast of that van again we broke. That was how I got introduced to her. I told him (the chauffeur I mean) that the car was to stay broke till I came and told him it was to be mended again, and that if he was asked in the meantime the name of his employer, he was to say any name in the world except the true one. There 's one thing, by the way, I forgot to tell you about her—about the woman I mean."

"Yes, what is that?" I asked.

She lowered her voice to a whisper: "The poor thing 's dying."

"What?" I exclaimed horrified. "Dying! Are you sure?"

"Sure? Well, yes, I 'm afraid I 'm sure —as sure as I can be. It was a sad sight to see her face, a sad sight. I asked her if she was ill, and she said 'No' at first, and then she said that she did n't know; but she did really, I think. I cannot tell you what 's the matter with her, but I think the main thing is that she 's got no wish to live. That 's about as bad a disease as any, I expect. I got a doctor from Exeter to come and see her. Of course he had to come by accident too, the same as I did. He told her he was a doctor and persuaded her to let him look at her. He said something about phthisis, a sort of decline, and anæmia (I never saw a woman who looked so ill look less anæmic) and so on; but he about said as much as that he could n't understand it, only that she was very bad, probably dying, poor thing, and he could do nothing for her."

"Is nothing being done for her?"

"Nothing. That is, everything that can be done. I made him promise that he would go and see her again, as often as ever he thought it any use to go and see her, and once a week oftener than that, and to report to me here. Is there any more to be done?"

I shook my head sadly, wondering—wondering at the heart of woman and its mysterious workings. I wondered less at the news that death had its grasp on the woman whom I had known first as George Hood's wife. If imminent death ever were written on the face of a woman still in fair health, it seemed to me that I might have read it as I looked at Gracia's perfect face while we sat together that day before the sea on the sand-hills of Braunton.

"How is the boy?" I asked. "Did you see the boy?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I saw the boy," she said. "He is splendid. He made me wish one thing only—you are a man, but still you may guess what that is."

I might have guessed, though I was mere man, as she said; but, before I could answer, the door was opened, and George Hood entered the room. He carried in his hand a long envelope. I thought that his wife glanced at it and started slightly, as if with recognition, or suspicion of recognition, as she noticed it—but could not be sure. I was too greatly struck by the look of Hood's face to be able to take careful note of other details. It was the first time for many days that I had seen him in the morning, and in a clear light, and his pallor and general look of ill-health distressed me. The dark circles below the eyes told of a lack of sleep, in spite of the heavy lids that seemed to testify to his continued use of narcotics. He moved in a listless, dull manner, as if he were still, at the moment, under the drug's influence, and wished me "Good morning" with an indifference that would have amounted to a discourtesy in a man of normal health.

"I wished you to be present," he said, "at an interview I am obliged to have

with my wife, in order to make to her an explanation with regard to a certain document which I have reason to think she has read."

He spoke with the level tones of a man reciting a rehearsed speech. Mrs. Hood made a movement as if she would say something in reply, but no words came, and he continued:

"The document I refer to is a will made by my father at a later date than that proved as his last testament." As he spoke he slightly raised the paper that he held in his hand to indicate that this paper was the document which he was mentioning. "That will was made under a misapprehension." He went on to describe, still in the same even and colorless tones, his father's belief that he was married to Gracia, taking on himself full blame for allowing that misapprehension to continue so long. He described his reconciliation with his father, after explanation of the facts. Finally, he came to the dramatic scene of his entry to his father's study, finding him in the act of

tearing up papers, among which was this will, still intact; and without a tremor or change in his voice related the heart-failure that was followed, after a period of unconsciousness, by death, while all the time the will that he had taken from the table remained in his own keeping.

Thus he narrated the facts, and proceeded to the more or less casuistical train of argument by which he had deemed himself justified in the suppression of this that legally was the true will. While he spoke I tried to discover the impression that his words were making, but quite vainly, for Mrs. Hood carefully kept her head averted. She had her elbow resting on the table and her face on her hand.

Presently the course of Hood's reading was interrupted by the sound, low but unmistakable, of a sob from his wife. Her figure shook a little, and I thought it was time that I should get up and look out through the window at Berkeley Square. At the next sound of similar distress Hood stopped speaking, and I

heard his wife say in a broken voice, "Forgive me—oh, forgive me!"

Hood answered, "Forgive you? I have nothing to forgive!"

"Oh, yes, you have," she insisted, still in the same faltering tones. "If you only knew, you have so much to forgive."

"Well?" he said.

"When I read that paper, the will—I have seen it before," she began, but he interrupted her with:

"Yes, I know you have read it."

"You know! How? Well, it does n't matter. I found your keys lying around, and—I was mad with jealousy, I could n't help it—I opened your drawer and I found this thing, and I read it. Oh, that was nothing," she said. "That in itself might be bad enough for some women; it might be bad enough for some to have to confess they had done that and ask their husbands' forgiveness for it: but it is nothing to what I have to ask you to forgive me."

"Well?" he said again.

"Well, it was like this. So soon as I

read that will and had got the understanding of it into my head—which I did n't do in a minute—then, from that moment right away I began to think the very worst of you. I judged that you had suppressed that will in order to rob somebody—anybody—everybody, of that money. I judged you the kind of man that ought to be in prison. Can you forgive me ever?"

"And having judged me so, and you could not possibly judge me otherwise on the evidence," he said "what did you do? All at once, from having been at cross purposes with me, you became kind, considerate, helping me; you became everything that a man wants his friend through life to be. I really do not see how I am to forgive you, for I really cannot see that I have anything to forgive. Very, very much the contrary."

The moment seemed to me to have come when I ought to take a closer view of Berkeley Square from outside the house. So far as I could judge there was no immediate fear of the crisis affecting George

Hood's heart beyond the strain which that organ could bear without my aid. I went out of the room, and, as I believe, neither of the others in it noticed that I went, nor were they for the moment aware of my existence. As I opened the door I could not resist one backward glance. Husband and wife were hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FELONY

It was only the next day that I found myself again in the Berkeley Square house, in response to a message from its hostess. Mr. and Mrs. Hood were together in his study when I was shown in.

"You went away just at the wrong time yesterday," she said.

"Just at the wrong time," Hood repeated.

"I am very sorry," I replied with hypocrisy.

Hood looked less ill than on the previous day. It was obvious that he had suffered no severe heart trouble in the short interval since I had seen him.

"George tells me," Mrs. Hood said, "that you had some little doubt, when he

consulted you, as to what he should have done about that will. Well, I have no such doubt. Perhaps it is because I am a wicked woman, perhaps it is because I come from a land where we do not respect the traditions quite as much as you do over here. Anyway, whatever the reason, I had not the slightest doubt, from the moment that he told me, in your hearing, all the circumstances connected with that will, that the most wrong and dishonest thing he could ever do would be to publish it, or have any hand in publishing it, as representing the last wishes of his father. He knew absolutely that it represented the very opposite of what were his father's wishes at the end. He was therefore not only justified in not making that will public, but he would not have been justified unless he had taken every measure to prevent its being published. Well —he did not take every possible measure, and in consequence there has been trouble."

"You mean——?" I asked.

"I mean that he ought to have de-

stroyed it then and there. Dead men and burnt wills tell no tales—that 's what I mean. Whether it would have been better for him to have told me all about it before we were married is another story—that was for him to judge—and anyhow, it 's too late to go back on all that now. But what it is not too late to do, is to do to that blessed will what ought to have been done with the fallacious thing years ago, and that is, burn it; and it 's to be present at that bonfire that we sent around for you to-day."

She paused then, and looked at me. George Hood looked at me also. I understood quite well the meaning of the looks and the motive of Mrs. Hood's speech. She had said, "We are going to burn the will." What she meant was, "We want to know what you think of the idea of burning the will," and meant also to suggest that I should think that it ought to be burnt. They were looking at me to see what I really did think. What did I think? The answer was not very plain in my own mind. It was very well

for Mrs. Hood, an American and a woman, as she had herself said with just appreciation, to decide the case on its merits. I, who had "eaten dinners" and actually been called to the Bar, was bound in a certain attenuated form of legal calf. I hesitated a while, but in the end the weight of Mrs. Hood's arguments, which, after all, coincided with the tendency of my own view, induced me to say "Yes"—not to go so far, which her considerate way of stating the case had made unnecessary, as to say that I approved of the burning of the will, but to consent, at their joint request, to witness the burning of the will, which had already been determined on. I compromised weakly with my convictions, telling myself that this was their affair, not mine, whether right was being done or wrong, and so far aided and abetted the act of felony as to give a poke to the fire. I do not know what may have been the sensations of the other and more principal actors—it was Mrs. Hood's bold small American hand that actually pushed the document into the flames—but

for my own part I can say that I felt a chill of conscious guilt shiver down my back as the paper crackled and blazed. I looked at George Hood to see whether any access of pulse-beat was affecting his heart, but he seemed perfectly unmoved.

"End of Act I.," Mrs. Hood said cheerfully, as the flames died down and left nothing but black bits of paper where the will had been. "Now we ring up the curtain on Act II. The property belongs to George now. There is no possibility of undoing that fact. If you and I and he went into court and told the whole story of the will, I don't suppose we should get any one to believe it now, should we? At all events, we are not proposing to do it. In the meantime the property is George's: he is troubled to know what to do with it. He is foolish—feels a certain unnecessary delicacy about keeping it. It is foolish of him, but I love him the better for feeling so."

She placed her hand on his arm in an affectionate way of protection. I looked

at his face and was surprised. In all that had gone before, in course of Mrs. Hood's previous speech and argument about the holocaust of the will, her husband had taken a silent, but an obviously acquiescent and an intelligent part. In this Second Act, as she called it, I could perceive that his rôle was merely that of a spectator, under the influence of an astonished interest in the unfolding of the drama. What she was saying now was entirely new to him, and he had no preconception what her next words would be.

"Have you any suggestions to offer," Mrs. Hood resumed, "as to what shall be done with that money?" She looked at her husband and she looked at me. Neither replied.

"Then if you have no ideas," she said—she said "i-dea" with just a suspicion of the American way of dwelling on the first syllable. "If you have no i-deas, I will tell you mine—that the money shall be put into a trust for the benefit of a certain little boy—I hardly know how to call him, but he is a little boy that all of us know,

and no doubt the law will have some way of describing him so that he can be identified—a little boy who is away down in the West just now, living with his mother in a caravan."

Perhaps Mrs. Hood ought not to have done it just in this way. She ought to have been more thoughtful, considering that her husband's heart was not very sound, and ought not to have subjected it to such an emotional surprise. But the poor lady had a good deal to occupy her excellent brain, in planning all these schemes in a financial and legal atmosphere that was not familiar to her. George went frightfully pale. He pressed his hand over his side convulsively. I fully thought he was on the point of losing consciousness, but after what appeared to be a spasm of terrible pain recovered himself quickly.

"Do you mean to say, Olga," he stammered, "that you—you—can make such a proposal as this?"

"Yes," she said, with an affected carelessness, "since no one else seems

to have had the intelligence to propose it."

Hood turned to me. "I told you long ago," he said, "that she was the most wonderful woman in the world; but I did not then know how wonderful."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HAND OF DEATH

THE details of the trust were arranged without difficulty, the law, as Mrs. Hood had foreseen, finding a way of identifying the beneficiary—as it was pleased to call him—Mrs. Hood and myself being appointed as trustees. The process of the business had required several interviews at the house in Berkeley Square, but about a fortnight after all had been settled I received a summons from Mrs. Hood more urgent than any that had called me to the business meetings. The words of the hand-sent note were not very coherent; they were written in evident haste, but I gathered from them that Hood had suffered one of his most severe heart attacks and was gravely ill.

When I came to the house I found that

the doctor was already there, and had been in attendance for several hours. He confessed himself in some doubt about his diagnosis. It seemed that Hood had been found by the housemaid, who came in the morning to open the shutters of the smoking-room, asleep, as she imagined, in the armchair. He had not moved at the noise made in opening the door, and the girl had gone out again. The butler did not come down till half an hour or so later, and immediately she saw him the housemaid told him that she had found their master in the smoking-room, asleep. The butler then went in. Hood was still half sitting, half lying, in the chair, not having moved at all since the girl first saw him. The butler thought that there was something not quite natural in the absolute stillness with which his master lay, and purposely made one or two little movements and noises beside him enough to awake a man in a normal sleep, but Hood still did not stir or show consciousness. Then the butler began to be seriously alarmed. He went for

Hood's servant, who said at once that he supposed his master to be suffering from the effects of some narcotic which he had been in the habit of taking. Between them the two men carried Hood to his room and laid him on his bed, with no more movement on his part than if they had been carrying a corpse. A little later Mrs. Hood's maid took in her mistress's tea, and by her they sent word that Mr. Hood seemed seriously unwell. As soon as Mrs. Hood had seen him she sent for the doctor, who had tried one or two simple means of bringing the patient back to consciousness, but without success. He had now determined to leave him a while to allow the possible effect of the narcotic to expel itself, but he confessed to some doubt as to the degree in which the comatose state of the patient was due to narcotic poisoning, and the degree to which it had been induced by a heart seizure which he suspected. He inquired particularly whether anything had occurred the previous evening likely to cause Hood shock or excitement, but

nothing of the kind could be remembered or suggested. When his wife had seen him last, about eleven o'clock at night, he had been in his normal state of indifferent health. No one had seen him since. He was in the habit of switching off the electric light for himself when he went to bed.

I went to his room to look at him, and, but for the doctor's assurance, should have thought it to be but the corpse of my friend that lay so pallid and inertly on the bed. His face and even his lips were of such an extraordinary whiteness that they did not make a patch of color even on the whiteness of the pillow. His hands against the sheet had a certain tint, but it was a yellow lividness of hue, not the color of healthy blood and skin. The doctor drew me aside and asked me if I was aware of any circumstances in George Hood's life that made it probable that a shock might have occurred to his system. "Of course," he added, "I do not ask you to violate any confidences, but I know you are his nearest friend." For answer I bade

the valet bring Hood's coat, and caused the doctor to feel the patch of mail armor sewn in where he had an apprehension of Tio's Spanish knife. "I cannot tell you any more," I said, "than what you may infer from that." He nodded thoughtfully, but said nothing.

It was not until after mid-day that Hood woke out of that deathly coma, and all that while Mrs. Hood and the doctor and myself were in and out of his room constantly, watching for a sign of his consciousness returning. The doctor, more and more puzzled, was on the point of sending for a colleague to share the responsibility by giving a second opinion—he was actually downstairs writing his note at the moment—when George Hood gently opened his eyes, looked up into mine with the saddest smile of recognition, and moved his lips. Twice he appeared to try to say the same words, but no sound came from his feebly parted mouth. I bent down over him with my ear close to his face. "What did you say, old friend?" I asked him.

Then his lips moved again as before, and I gathered the faintly uttered words: "She 's dead."

I had no doubt that he was speaking in pursuance of some dream or vision that had occupied his hours of unconsciousness. I nodded to him, with a smile, as one humors a sick man's fancies. Then I went down-stairs, many steps at a time, to summon the doctor.

From that moment until late in the afternoon no one was permitted to see Hood except the two doctors and a professional nurse. The doctors' dictum was that the heart was in state so feeble that the slightest effort might be too great for it, and both Mrs. Hood and myself were forbidden to enter the sick-room on the very reasonable ground that our presence might induce Hood to make an effort to speak to us which he would not be so likely to make with strangers. The doctors hardly tried to disguise their extremely grave opinion of the case, but seemed inclined to think that the patient gained strength as the day wore on.

About six o'clock one of them came to me and said: "We think you had better go to him. He is so very anxious to talk to you that to prevent it would be likely to agitate and excite him more harmfully than the actual fatigue of talking. But try to let him talk as little as you can. Sit close beside him, so that he will not have to speak above a whisper."

A great change for the better had passed in my poor friend's aspect during the hours since I had seen him last. His cheeks had a spot of hectic color, and his lips had not the same deathly, bloodless look. He greeted me with the smile that always lighted his face so charmingly as I came in.

"Glad to see you looking so much better, old fellow," I said.

I drew the chair close beside the bed. "Yes," he agreed in a weak voice, "I am better, for a while—I don't think it is for long."

"Ah, you must n't say that," I pleaded.

"I don't say it very regretfully," he replied.

"Not for yourself perhaps," I said. "But you might regret it for us—for your wife and me, if anything should happen to you."

"Would you miss me?" he asked pathetically. He put out a feeble hand and sought with it till he found mine ready to grasp it gently. "But that again will not be for long. I think we shall all meet again somehow—somewhere."

"I am so glad you are able to think that," I said.

"Then I don't think we shall have any misunderstandings. I think we shall all know each other then. It's the not understanding that makes all the trouble and unhappiness, is it not?"

"Most of it, no doubt," I said.

"Then you and I and Gracia and Olga may all be friends together, I think. At all events we shall know about it soon. I shall know very soon. Gracia is there already. She knows now."

"There already! What do you mean?"

"I forgot. Did you not know? Gracia

is dead. She came to me last night to tell me."

I had no doubt that he was slightly delirious, but he spoke perfectly calmly.

"I think that was what upset me," he went on, in the most matter-of-fact voice to be conceived. "I was in the smoking-room alone, late, and she came in; or at least she was there, I do not know how she came in. I do not suppose that she opened my door, for doubtless her body is there, down in the West country. I cannot tell you how it was, but I knew that she was dead. She said nothing to me, and she looked as I had always known her, with all her beauty and color, but I knew that she was dead. I was going to speak to her, but it seemed as if the effort choked me, and after that I remember nothing—till now."

I had no manner of doubt that this story was a suggestion of his subconscious mind while he lay in his coma. I found that he did not really wish to say much more to me, after mentioning his wish and his confidence that his boy should be well looked

after; and remembering the doctor's caution that I should let him talk as little as possible, I soon left him.

From time to time, during the rest of the day, his wife and I were constantly with him. The doctor had left instructions with the nurse to call him by telephone if any change occurred, and I augured the worst from this. All through the afternoon, however, there was no appreciable loss in his strength, and whenever I saw him he smiled with a cheerful courage that was very touching. He did not talk much more to me, his weakness probably making compliance with the doctor's orders in this respect quite easy for him. Once when his wife came out she was in tears, and I guessed that he might have been saying "Good-bye" to her.

About half-past eight in the evening Mrs. Hood and I were dining together when a summons came from the nurse. We hastened up-stairs to find that the great change had begun. Hood lay with a slight restlessness of the hands, but a perfectly placid face. He was quite un-

conscious. Just before he died the doctor came, but nothing was to be done, and in silent helplessness we watched the peaceful passing of his life.

It was about half-past eleven when I left the house where I had been so many hours. My head was hot and fevered, and I had a desire to walk far and fast through the fresh night air before going to my rooms; but I had taken no more than a few steps down the pavement of Berkeley Square when a man stopped me. For the first moment I thought he was a beggar, but the next I recognized him. It was Tio. Even by the uncertain gleam of the street lamp I saw a look in his eye that caused me to glance down the street and feel a certain relief at the sight of the familiar British figure of the policeman on beat.

Tio lost no time and wasted no words in formal greetings. "Is it true," he demanded with a fierce energy, "that he is dead?"

"That who is dead?" I asked, though I knew perfectly of whom he spoke.

"Your friend, Mr. Hood. Is he dead? I know this is his house. They told me he was dead."

"Yes, Tio," I said, "he is dead. He has been dead some hours."

He swore, in a fierce, low voice, a gypsy oath. Then he put his hand to his belt with a quick movement, at which I went backward a step. Tio noticed my action, and smiled with a scorn that seemed to say I need not be afraid, that I was too small game for his bag. He drew out his knife, bent down and laid the bright blade on the pavement, set his foot across the steel, and with a press of foot and hoist of hand snapped the blade in two. He drew himself upright and crossed himself piously. Then he expectorated, with a solemnity which showed that this too was part of some religious or mystic rite, over the shattered steel.

"What did you do that for?" I asked him.

"I swore to her," he said in explanation, "that the first thing my knife should touch would be his heart, his life."

I thought of the patch of mail.

"His life is gone," he went on, "and that oath is broken; but now the knife is broken too, and it will never be for any other use."

"Did she require this oath of you—ask you to swear it, I mean?"

"She! She had no heart left for such a thing. He—that dead man—stole all the heart and courage from her. She! She was all the while begging me not to do it, telling me I was not to do it."

"And why did you not do as she told you? Why did you come here on such an errand? What do you think she would have said to you if you had come back and told her you had done it?"

"What she would have said?" he repeated savagely. "I should not have come if there had been a chance of her 'saying' when I went back. She has gone, like him, where there is no 'saying,' and they can be settling their affairs even now between themselves."

I started with surprise. "You mean to say that she is dead?"

"She is dead — yes," he answered. "And you know, better than most, who killed her. It was him, your friend, the dead man in that house." He jerked his thumb fiercely at the house in question.

"She is dead!" I echoed. "When did she die?"

"Before midnight last—a day from this hour, hour for hour, or nearly so."

It was a very astonishing thing. He indicated the exact time at which George Hood had fancied that he saw her. The step of the policeman came resonantly up the pavement. I said nothing till he had passed us. My thoughts were full of this strange coincidence, if it were not to be called by another name. If Gracia had not appeared to Hood, or if Hood had not fancied her apparition (in whichever way it may be right to state it) doubtless a horrid tragedy would have been enacted, followed by a horrid scandal. It is seldom that these telepathic appearances, attested by so many witnesses, of one at the moment of death to another, seem to serve

any purpose; but this had served an obvious purpose.

The policeman went by again with his eye fixed in suspicion on Tio, and glancing scarcely more favorably at myself. Tio returned his look with undisguised hostility, and, as a precaution, set his foot on the fragments of his knife.

"You say she begged you not to do him an injury?" I said when the man had passed. There was no need to explain to whom the pronouns referred to.

"When I offered to swear I would kill him she wanted me to swear I would not. Poor thing, he had taken all the heart out of her. But I would not do it. I swore that I would kill him."

"Was that soon before she died?"

"Within an hour. Have you any more questions?"

"One or two. First, what are you going to do now she is dead?"

"Why do you want to know that?"

"There is some money to come to you under Mr. Hood's will."

Tio laughed. "Mr. Hood can keep his

money," he said, "or, at least, any one it's of use to may have it. I don't want to touch his dirt. I shall go back to Spain."

"You will do as you like about your money," I said, "but there's another thing in the will that concerns you a little—the boy."

I had expected trouble, and it was a relief when he said carelessly: "Oh, the boy!—you may have him if you want him. He's of no use to me."

Hate was a strong passion with Tio. Because the child was half George Hood's, whom he had hated, he was indifferent to it, though it was also half Gracia's, whom he had worshipped. Also, although hate was a strong passion with him, it left room, maybe, for other motives, and he was doubtless relieved to be rid of the incumbrance of a boy.

So that was the end of it, of the aspirations and the self-torturings. Hither my friend had been brought by the guidance of his "dæmon," or rather, as he would have phrased it, by his own ineffective following of the guidance. To this

end it had come at last, the life of him who once had prayed God that he might be shown the way of truth, with the view of going down into the arena of life and fighting to make it clear to others. There was an irony in it all. Capable of so much, accomplishing so little, or nothing at all; or, if anything, only that which it had been better had not been done! Yet that, after all, is perhaps more than we have the right to say. It is not for us but for the Creator of life to say that He is, or is not, justified of this or that one of His children, His creations. To judge them is perhaps to judge through them the Creator, which is hardly within the duty of the creature.

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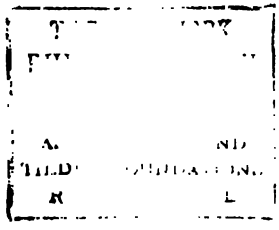
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